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AN INTRODUCTION TO  
ENGLISH INDUSTRIAL HISTORY

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# AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH INDUSTRIAL HISTORY,

BY

HENRY ALLSOPP, B.A.

LATE VICE-PRINCIPAL OF RUSKIN COLLEGE, OXFORD

THIRD EDITION



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TO  
ALBERT MANSBRIDGE

## PREFACE

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THIS book is an attempt to make a really interesting, simple and suggestive introduction to industrial and economic history. It is intended mainly to stimulate our young men and women of all classes to take up earnestly the study of this important subject, which has hitherto been beyond the reach of most young people because the only available text-books have been either out-of-date or far too learned and academic, as well as too expensive.

The author's difficulty has been to know what to omit, but every effort has been made to include only the essential features and to present those in such a form as will tempt students to read the larger and more advanced books on the subject. A descriptive list of the most interesting books on the various portions of the subject will be found in the appendix.

The sketch of a manor is, it is hoped, simple without being misleading. The two population maps are intended to illustrate clearly the growth of population in the eighteenth century.

Thanks are due to Mr. J. Munro, M.A. (Beit Lecturer in Colonial History at the University of Oxford), and to my wife, to whom the author owes many suggestions and kind criticisms; and to Messrs. A. L. Smith, M.A., and H. W. C. Davis, M.A. (both of Balliol College, Oxford), who have, by their teaching, made this book possible, but are, of course, not responsible for any of the statements made.

H. A.

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## INTRODUCTION

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IN what ways do men get their incomes now? How have Englishmen obtained their living from the earliest times? How did the various trades arise? How is it that great industries like the Woollen Industry are settled in certain definite districts? What is the history of the working-classes? What sort of lives did they lead in earlier days?

All these are but a few of the questions which a book on Industrial History must try to answer. We have to see how working-people have gained their daily bread during the course of our history. We have to see how the land has been parcelled out, how it has been cultivated, how it has come to bear its present appearance of patchwork with hedges or walls for seams. We have to trace the growth of our great modern towns, and of our vast modern industries. We have to show how the workers of England have risen from a state of almost complete serfdom to a very real freedom.

The curious thing is that until quite recently historians hardly troubled to find out anything about the lives and occupations of the working-classes who lived in past ages. This branch of

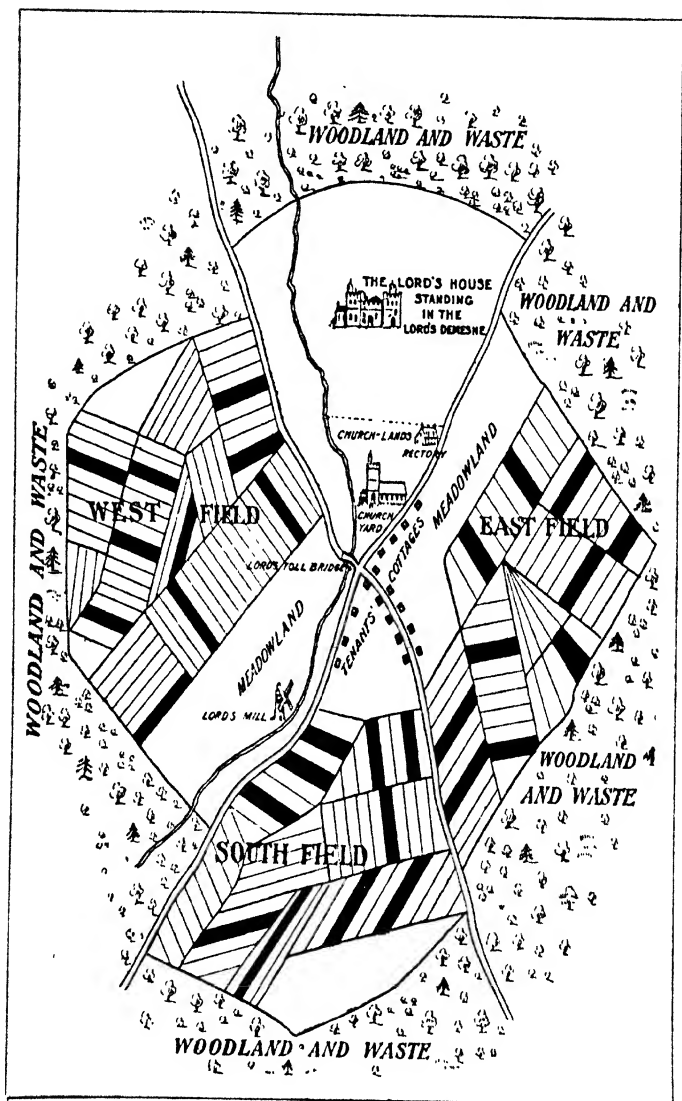
history, which is certainly one of the most interesting if not the most valuable of all parts of history, is still in its infancy and many subjects are still very imperfectly known. But enough has been studied to show us clearly the broad general lines upon which industrial progress has been made; and what is perhaps more important, working men and women are themselves becoming eager to know how the workers who preceded them in distant ages won their way a little further towards freedom. For after all, there is little use in trying to cure our own evils of unemployment, long hours, dangerous trades, sweated labour, or low wages until we have really tried to understand the causes which have produced those evils.

The aim of Industrial or Economic History is therefore: (1) To trace the history of the trades and occupations by which men get their living; (2) to show how evils have arisen or been overcome in the past; (3) to find out the causes of our modern industrial conditions; (4) to safeguard us against making the same mistakes our ancestors made.

But in studying industrial history we must always remember that it is only a part of history as a whole. It omits to take account of religion, of our affections, of our social sympathies, of our artistic emotions. Yet all these are at least equally important in the history of any nation; and all of them in their growth and influence are more or less independent of monetary or material considerations. History indeed may be studied through many kinds of spectacles. For industrial

history we require a kind of spectacles which obscure all other factors and events than those which relate to the way in which men laboured, earned their living and produced useful articles. For military history we require spectacles that throw into relief all wars, battles and soldiers. For history as a whole we require perfect eyesight that enables us to see *all* the activities of men, and *all* the influences that have shaped a nation. But industrial history must not be underrated because it is only one aspect of history ; it is an aspect that vitally concerns all of us, that none of us can ignore, and it is therefore a study of the utmost practical value to all those who desire to see our great nation and every English subject happier, wiser, healthier.

# PLAN OF A MANORIAL VILLAGE



# PART I

## THE MANORIAL SYSTEM



### CHAPTER I

#### THE PEOPLE ON THE LAND (1066-1550)

WHEN William of Normandy decided in 1086 to draw up an account of all the wealth his new kingdom contained, the surface of England was very different from its present state. At that time the greater part of Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire was dense forest-land, with few roads through it save the ancient tracks along the ridges of the Downs. For twenty or thirty miles around the Wash there was a great swamp with small islands here and there, such as those which supported Ely and Peterborough. Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire were either thick woodlands or bleak moors, almost impassable save where the old Roman roads had been cut sheer through to the other side. Lancashire was mostly wild moors, swamps and forests; so, too, was the greater part of Yorkshire.

The rivers were different; for very few of them

had weirs built across them; very few were spanned by bridges. The only way of crossing was usually by stepping-stones for foot passengers, and by fords for horsemen and the clumsy wagons with wooden wheels which were then almost the only vehicles.

But in many of the valleys were expanses of natural meadow-land; or perhaps the Britons, the Romans, the Saxons or the Danes had tree by tree cleared away the forest, had ploughed the clearing, and made a little village. If the clearing happened to be at a ford where an important road crossed the river, then possibly a little town grew there. So that a foreign traveller through England in the year 1086 would have concluded that the country was chiefly forest and swamp with picturesque islands of meadows and ploughed fields and little villages or towns scattered about the islands.

Now to William the Conqueror the land was wealth, and he claimed it all; to him it meant not only money but fighting-men. To each of his chief followers he had lent large pieces of land, and in return they were to provide him with armed warriors and with money from time to time. It was therefore very necessary that William should know as exactly as possible how much land he had lent to each person, what sort of land it was, how many people were on it, and how much it was worth.

For this purpose he sent out officials (whom we should nowadays call commissioners or investigators) to ride through each shire, from town to

town, from village to village, and to find out from the people who actually lived and worked on the land everything that he desired to know about that land. Luckily, we happen to know exactly what the questions were which William wished his commissioners to ask; for some one at the Abbey of Ely made a careful list of the questions which the monks of Ely had to answer, and (very fortunately) this list has been preserved. The questions asked were: "What is the name of this manor? Who held it in the time of King Edward? Who holds it now? How many acres are there? How many ploughs belong to the lord of the manor? How many belong to the villeins, cottars, slaves, freemen and sokemen? How much woodland is there? How much meadow? How much pasture? How many mills and fisheries are there? How much has been added to or taken away from the estate? How much was the estate formerly worth? How much is it worth now? How much had or has each freeman or sokeman there? Could it be made worth any more?"

Evidently the king was very anxious to get accurate information about the wealth of his kingdom; for the answers were carefully written down on strips of parchment by trained Norman clerks who accompanied the commissioners. Then all the statements referring to each county were sent up to London and arranged county by county in order of importance to make the wonderful old book which we now call *Domesday Book*. The details of each county are grouped together; first



comes the information about the county-town; then follows a list of all those in the county to whom the king had lent land. If the king himself held land he was mentioned first, then the archbishops, bishops, and abbots. Afterwards came the earls, then the barons, then "the king's servants, sergeants or thegns."

For example, here is a simplified translation from the quaint old Latin of the part of *Domesday Book* relating to Oxford and Oxfordshire:—

"OXENEFORDSCIRE.—In the time of King Edward Oxford paid, instead of tolls, taxes and all the other duties, to the King £20 and six measures (of 4 gallons each) of honey: and to Count Algar £10. . . . When the King went to war 20 burgesses had to go with him, instead of all the burgesses having to go; if the 20 did not go then £20 had to be paid to the King so that all the burgesses might be free from serving. Nowadays Oxford pays £60. . . . In this town there are, including those outside the town-wall, 243 houses assessed for taxes and besides these are 478 houses ruined and laid waste which cannot be assessed for taxation.

*(Then comes a list of names of tenants.)*

All these aforesaid hold the aforesaid houses free from tax on condition that they keep the town-wall in repair; all these wall-houses were in the time of King Edward free from all duties except service in war and keeping the wall in repair.

All the burgesses of Oxford have in common outside the wall a meadow for which they pay six shillings and eightpence."

Picture the chief men of Oxford trying to make the Norman clerks understand exactly what their privileges were, what rights they had, how much they had been accustomed to pay, and what their famous Port Meadow was worth. They would try very hard to underrate as much as possible what-

ever they had formerly paid to their Saxon king, who had evidently allowed Oxford many special privileges, such as being free from all taxes save the one lump sum of £20 and the six measures of honey. The large number of ruined houses was probably due to the fact that many Saxons had run away, or been killed. Possibly, too, many houses were laid waste when the castle was built.

Here is another simple translation of the entry in *Domesday Book* about a manor in Shropshire :—

“ Roger holds Stokesay. Ældred held it and was a free man. These 7 hides pay geld (=gold or tax). There is land enough for 7 ploughs. In demesne there were 5 ploughs and 16 serfs and bondwomen; and there are 20 villeins with 8 ploughs and 9 female cottars. A mill is there which yields (a revenue to the lord) of 9 horse-loads of corn; and there is a miller and a keeper of the bees. In the time of King Edward it was worth 10 pounds.”

But though we now see what *Domesday Book* was, and though we probably see how very valuable it is for us who wish to study the history of the people who have lived on the land, yet it is probably not very clear what some of the commissioners' questions meant. What, for example, was *a manor*? What was *a villcin*? What was *a cottar*? What was *a sokeman*? What was the difference between serfs, cottars, villeins, sokemen and freemen?

Clearly it is necessary to explain what “a manor” was, and in the course of that explanation the other difficulties will also be removed. But first a word of warning is necessary: the student who sets out to understand what the Norman

clerks meant by " a manor " or by " a villein " or by " a serf " must try to forget that he has ever heard these words before ; he must try to rid himself of all the meanings which are given to those words nowadays ; he must remember that we are going to look at England in 1086.

## CHAPTER II

### A MANOR AND ITS PEOPLE

THINK of any old English village that you know well. Imagine it to be far away from a railway-station and to be approachable only by winding lanes through the woods and over the moors. Picture it without any hedgerows or ditches. Try to think you are standing on the top of the old church-tower and then we will describe what it looked like when the clerks of William of Normandy visited it in 1086.

Probably the church-tower is the very same one which the Normans built. It stands on the rising ground a short distance from the place where the four lanes meet. The churchyard is in front of it ; behind it is the small stone house where the parson lives. Still farther behind and higher up the rising ground is the house of " the lord of the manor." Perhaps it is a castle, with a round tower, a great gateway and a large hall. If not a castle, it will be a fortified house. It stands in a small park which goes down to the stream which flows alongside the churchyard.

Still facing the cross-roads, we see on our right a great wide field (the West-field). In front of us is the South-field, which is just about the same

size. On our left is a similar field, the East-field. All these three fields are plough-lands, but the West-field is growing wheat, the South-field is growing oats, while the East-field is growing nothing but grass. (In other words, it is lying fallow.)

At this time next year the East-field will be growing wheat, the West-field will be growing oats, and the South-field will be lying fallow. A year later still the West-field will be fallow; and so each field has one year's rest in every three years.

But these are such fields as we very rarely see in England at the present time. Nowadays we think a field is a big one if it measures 20 acres; but each of these three fields which stretch far away around us up the hillsides is perhaps 200 acres, 500 acres or even more; and there is not a hedge to be seen on them or round them. But where the plough-land ceases, all around there is the moor or the forest; so that we are really looking at an island of cultivated land, which is surrounded by land that has not yet been cultivated.

There is another striking difference, too, between these great Norman fields and ours of to-day. The two which are growing wheat and oats are all divided up into small strips about a chain wide, each strip measuring about an acre (or half an acre). Between each strip is about a foot of weedy, grassy earth that has not been ploughed. This is usually called "a balk" and is merely left, although it is a waste of good land, in order to divide one strip from another. Thus the appearance of these "open-fields" is very strange to modern eyes.

To whom, then, do these three great fields belong? In reality they belong to King William, but he has lent them to one of his warriors or one of his bishops, who is now called the lord of the manor. But there were already people living on some parts of this land when William lent it. Notice the little houses down there, each house standing in a little plot of ground surrounded by a fence. There are about forty houses, most of them clustering round the four cross-roads. What happened to these people when King William lent this great tract of land to his warrior? The answer is that very little happened to them save that they probably had to work a little harder, and had to send a little more corn, and a few more eggs or fowls, up to the lord's house.

And who are these people, and what sort of people are they? They are the people of the manor. Some of them are freemen and sokemen, each of whom uses every year quite a large number of those strips of land in each of the three fields. He does not *possess* the strips, they are really lent to him and to his heirs by the lord of the manor so that he may cultivate them. They will be lent to him so long as he pays to the lord of the manor what are called "the feudal dues"; so long as he faithfully appears in the lord's hall on the specified days and satisfies the lord with his payments and behaviour.

But by far the greater number of people are *villcins*. Each villcin usually has the right to use about thirty of those strips altogether—ten in each field. But he is not free to give all his time to

them. He must work for the lord perhaps two days every week (week-work), and in addition must give extra days (boon-work) at busy times. He cannot leave the district without the lord's consent ; in fact, he belongs to the lord. But as long as he performs the duties which a villein is expected to perform in that district he is safe ; his strips of land are assured to him ; his lord, if a good man, will protect him against all interference from other people.

Very similar to the villeins are the *bordars* and *cottars* ; but they probably had fewer strips and more time which they could call their own.

Lowest of all are the people who had no land at all, save perhaps the merest plot round their hut. These were the slaves, who had to give almost all their time to their lord. They were probably the descendants of the ancient Britons.

Altogether, *Domesday Book* records that there were in England about 35,000 freemen and sokemen, 108,000 villeins, 88,000 bordars and cottars, and 25,000 slaves.

Such was the commonest kind of Norman manor—a large tract of land consisting of a portion of the uncultivated moorland and forest surrounding the three great open-fields which had formerly been reclaimed from the waste ; the lord's private land (his "demesne") ; the church and the church-lands ; the cottages of the freemen, sokemen, villeins and serfs ; perhaps a flour-mill belonging to the lord, and possibly, too, over the stream a bridge which also belonged to the lord. In other words, a manor was a village with the land round

about it—the three large ploughed fields, the demesne and often a large amount of the uncultivated “waste” as it was sometimes called. All this was under the jurisdiction of the lord, whose steward or bailiffs saw that the rules and customs of the manor were properly carried out.

A knowledge of a few of the rules and customs of a manor will show us quite clearly how the manor was managed and how it affected the lives of the working-people. But it must always be remembered that very probably no two manors were exactly alike whether in customs or arrangement. All we can do here is to describe broadly what we may call a typical manor.

Let us begin by asking and answering a few questions. Why did the manor usually have three fields? Because men had found by bitter experience centuries before that if they sowed wheat every year on the same patch of ground, their crops would become steadily poorer and smaller year by year. Probably they did not understand why this was so; but the science of Botany has made it clear to us that wheat in its growth takes out of the soil certain minerals which it needs, and unless these minerals are replaced wheat will not grow well on that ground after a few years. Our ancestors found, however, that *oats or barley* would grow on the same patch as had produced wheat the year before, and the science of Botany again shows us that oats and barley do not require quite the same minerals as wheat. But even if wheat and oats (or barley) were sown alternately, the ground became rapidly



less fertile ; so, in the absence of any great knowledge of manures, our forefathers found it most profitable to leave a piece of their plough-land fallow every year, so that it could rest, could grow grass and weeds to be eaten by sheep and cattle which would naturally sprinkle it with manure containing some of the very necessary minerals. Thus there arose a two-field system and afterwards a three-field system. Wheat was required for bread, oats for porridge and for cattle-food ; so in order to get both crops in sufficient quantity and in order to have a piece of good "rested" land for next year's necessary crop of wheat, three fields were required.

But why were the fields divided into the strips of one acre or half an acre each ? This was largely due to the fact that, in those early times, before money was very much used, land was almost the only *wealth* a man could possess. A man's position usually depended then not on the amount of money or the number of sheep, cows or houses he possessed, but, first, on the amount of land which had been lent to him either by the king or by the lord of the manor, and, secondly, on the conditions on which the land was lent to him. A freeman or sokeman held land of any amount on quite easy terms ; he had only to render certain small services to the lord of the manor, to appear regularly at the lord's court, and to behave himself and observe the customs of the manor, and for the rest he could please himself. A villein, on the other hand, held his land on condition of doing the fixed amount of week-work and boon-work for the lord to whom he belonged ;

he was protected so long as he performed his services, but he was unfree because he had to perform them there on that manor which he was not allowed to leave. The serf was not free at all because he held no land ; he was possessed entirely by the lord.

Now, since all freemen on a manor were equal to each other in rank, because all villeins were equal to each other in rank and all serfs to each other, how could the members of each class be treated fairly when the land was shared out each year ? Every freeman would want in each field exactly the amount of land to which he was entitled ; so would every villein. But all the land is not equally good ; some is stony, some is swampy, some is rich deep soil, some is heavy clay. Therefore, if freeman John is to have 60 acres in the wheat-field he would naturally like it all to be where the rich deep soil is. But that is just what every one on the manor would like. The fairest way, therefore, seems to be to cut *all* the land up into small strips of about one acre each and to give freeman John a strip here and a strip there, some good and some bad, until he has his 60 acres altogether.

That is exactly what was done on the Norman manors. Every spring all the men who were entitled to hold land on the manor gathered together to meet the lord or his steward, who, along with the reeve—a man chosen by the people of the manor to be a sort of overlooker or foreman—cast lots for the strips in each field until every man had his proper share. Thus there was very little cause for quarrelling about the quality of the land each man

got. The whole scheme was in fact devised for the sake of fairness to all concerned.

But it was a very wasteful method. The mere "balks" between the strips wasted quite a large part of the field. Think too of the time it would take freeman John to walk from strip to strip; think how useless it would be for him to keep his strips clear from weeds if the holders of the adjoining strips did not trouble to kill their weeds.

Why, then, did this manorial system last so long? Partly because it was so fair an arrangement, but partly, too, because the whole manor was like a little separate kingdom, ruled by the lord and his court. The villeins and serfs had very little, if any, private property of their own. The ploughs they used were the ploughs of the manor. So, too, as a rule, were the horses, the oxen, the tools. The freemen and sokemen often possessed these useful things in their own right. But for the villeins there was clearly only one possible way of cultivating the strips: they must co-operate in the use of the ploughs, just as they co-operated in the use of the land. Thus the ploughing, sowing and reaping were done by the villeins as a body. First the lord's land was attended to, then the villeins' strips.

Naturally this regular co-operation made it necessary for certain villeins to become what we might nowadays call specialists. One was the hay-ward, who attended to the hay-crop; another was the shepherd, who took charge of all the sheep during the daytime; a third was the swineherd, who attended to all the pigs. The sheep were led to the

stretches of waste—the *common-land*—and there watched by the shepherd; the pigs wandered amongst the brushwood and undergrowth tended by the swineherd.

Doubtless each village contained, too, a smith, a miller, and a carpenter. These were usually men who held and worked a little land but who received payment for their other work not in money but in food. We may picture the smith bargaining with a villager who requires a new spade.

“ *Villager* :—Now, Rob the Smith, I want a new spade making.

*Smith* :—What will you give me for making it ?

*Villager* :—I’ll give you two fowls.

*Smith* :—Nay, lad. I don’t want fowls. I’ve just bargained with Hal the miller to make him a new shovel for two fowls.

*Villager* :—Shall we say a young pig ?

*Smith* :—No, I’ve got more pigs now than I want.

*Villager* :—What then ? A measure of corn ?

*Smith* :—Ay ! that will do. When do you want the spade ? ”

Similarly, too, it was usually the case that every one on the manor paid the lord regularly a certain amount of produce; and the lord, of course, contrived to decide what each man must pay, so that all his own wants were supplied so far as food was concerned. For example, on a manor at Kettering, under the lordship of the Abbey of Peterborough, there were forty villeins who had among them twenty-two ploughs. In spring, each villein had to plough four acres for the abbey, and the village ploughs, with the labour needed to work them, had to be supplied at other times if necessary. Each

villein had to work for the abbey three days every week. The whole village had to pay every year to the abbey 50 hens and 640 eggs, and every villein had also to pay 2s. 1½d. in money every year. The miller paid the abbey £1 a year for the use of the mill and, no doubt, charged every one who brought corn to be ground either a small sum of money or, more probably, a small amount of corn or other food.

On this manor there were also eight "cottars" who held only five acres each; these men worked one day a week for the abbey, and twice a year they had to make malt for the monks. If they kept goats they had to pay a small tax. The shepherd had no land and was kept by the village as a whole, but the swineherd had eight acres of land.

From this description it will perhaps be clear that each manor was really in many ways like a separate little country having very little to do with the adjoining manors. It produced for itself practically all the food it required; its people were clothed in rough clothes made of leather, which they prepared themselves, or of coarse wool, which they spun and wove or knitted in their own homes. All their implements, save possibly the few very precious iron tools, were entirely produced in the manor, and many even of the iron tools were worked up by the smith from the crude lumps of iron which were bought at the nearest town where a great fair was held.

There were therefore many reasons why such a wasteful system should continue to exist. Not only was it a real attempt at a just distribution,

it was also based on a sort of fellowship and co-operation. Then, too, it had its roots far away back in the distant past when the Angles and Saxons lived in what we now call Germany. It had an enormous weight of tradition behind it. Even to this day country-people are very prone to glorify what their grandfathers did and to long for what they call "the good old times." But respect for what their grandfathers had done played a very much bigger part in the lives of the villeins of the eleventh century. The *custom of the manor*, in other words the rules and traditions which had grown up with the manor, controlled men's lives even more strongly than our laws and policemen control our lives now. Even the lord had to respect the customs of the manor. He had to treat his freemen, his villeins, his serfs as the people of those classes had been treated for generations past. He could usually ask them to perform only the services which his great-grandfather had been able to demand. On the other hand, the freemen, villeins and serfs had to perform all the services which their ancestors had been accustomed to perform. If they did not do so they could be fined, they could have some or all of the lands they held taken away; a freeman could be degraded to a villein; a villein could lose even the little freedom and respectability he had and be made into a mere serf. Yet if the serf gained the lord's favour, he might, if the custom of the manor allowed, become a villein or even a freeman. Serfs and villeins, too, sometimes saved enough money, or found money, or gained it by

plunder in warfare, to buy their freedom. But this was probably not very common.

Thus the people of the manor were really ruled by the customs of the manor, and if the lord, or a village, was in doubt as to the custom on any particular matter then the lord held an inquiry, and the wise men (usually the oldest men) of the manor were asked what the custom was. Naturally the customs varied greatly from manor to manor ; that is why it is so necessary to remember that probably no two manors were exactly alike. Yet it is evident that respect for the custom of the manor was one of the strongest forces which kept the manorial system in existence for so long.

But it is clear that such a system was almost stationary. Improvements in farming were well-nigh impossible ; in fact, the man who desired to do anything different from the customs of the manor would doubtless be looked upon as something of a nuisance. Then, too, the lives of the people had very little scope for variation. This was especially true of the villeins and serfs. They lived in their little hovels of mud or wood ; they tilled the little patch of enclosed ground which surrounded their hut ; they worked in the open-fields at their strips ; they toiled for the lord of the manor ; they tended the few fowls, sheep, pigs or cattle which went with their holding ; they attended the lord's court, paid their dues, and lived the narrow, restricted lives which the poorest agricultural labourers have always lived. On Sundays and holy-days they crowded to the little village-church, the priest of which was probably

the only person in the neighbourhood who had even a smattering of learning. To him also they had to render tribute; they paid him first-fruits and tenths—in other words, they gave him each year some of the first produce of every kind, whether corn, eggs or lambs, and in addition were supposed to render one-tenth of all their produce in order to maintain, not only their own church, but the great Pope in Rome, who at this time was very anxious that the taxes called “Peter’s Pence” and “Romescot” should be paid regularly. Only on holy-days and feast-days was there any real relaxation from toil. At Christmas doubtless there was much rough revelry and jollity. On May Day there would doubtless be dances and songs. But on the whole the impression one gets from a study of the lowlier folk on a Norman manor is one of hard work, very small liberty, little pleasure, wretched housing and clothing, much plain food and drink, and lives spent on the one manor with very rarely a journey, very rarely even a visit from other manors; for the roads were few and those few were doubtless bad roads.

Then, again, it must be remembered that after 1066 these lowlier folk were not of the same race as the lords of the manors, who were Normans, speaking Norman-French, dressing differently, behaving differently, often despising the conquered Saxons by whose produce they were maintained, from whose labour the whole manor gained its value. In fact, to the poorer Saxons the greatest effect of the Norman Conquest was probably their feeling that their position was steadily becoming



worse, more servile, more restricted, more arduous ; for although the manorial system was growing up in England before 1066, yet it was not the hard, rigid system which the Normans made of it, and the Saxons must have felt very acutely that the customs by which their lives had previously been ruled had soon become very hard. Perhaps most of all they felt the absence of their old English overlords who were part of the manor, and part as it were of the blood of the manor, as no Norman lord could ever hope to be. Perhaps that was why the Saxon monk of Peterborough was so shocked when William of Normandy sent out his commissioners to value all the land of England. The monk wrote : " So minutely did he cause it to be investigated that there was not one piece of land, nor even (*it is shameful to write of it though he did not think it was shameful to do it*) an ox, a cow or a pig that was not set down in his writ." When we read the words printed in italics we can almost imagine the pious old Saxon muttering, " No English lord would have done such a mean thing."

But King William knew his business, and henceforth *Domesday Book* was constantly referred to when disputes arose about manors or the customs of manors ; and the very fact that so much was written down in *Domesday Book* often had the effect of making the custom of the manor all the more rigid, all the harder to avoid ; for it is difficult to evade what is written, and the words can always be referred to as a hard-and-fast rule which must not be broken, if only because they are the king's.

For all these reasons, then, the manorial system lasted with (1) its three open-fields of strips (the common-fields); (2) its common-land (*common-able waste*), which provided by far the greater part of the pasture-land upon which the villagers could feed their cattle, sheep and pigs; (3) its demesne (the lord's own land); (4) and usually but not always, its church-lands. On the manor lived (1) its serfs, who were little more than slaves; (2) its villeins and cottars, who were partly enslaved and partly free; (3) its freemen; (4) the lord, his household, his officials; (5) the clergy.

## CHAPTER III

### WHY AND WHEN THE MANORIAL SYSTEM BROKE UP

WE have seen that the Normans made England a country of self-contained manors, a country in which the bond that held all the people together was the very land itself. All the land was considered to belong to the king, who lent it to his barons, who lent it to his freemen and his villeins. The villeins paid the lords for the use of the land partly by their labour, partly by their produce : the more land they held, the more labour and produce they usually had to pay. The freemen paid for the use of their land partly by produce, partly by acting as soldiers. The lords paid for the use of their lands partly by money, but mainly by acting as soldiers themselves and by providing a number of soldiers in proportion to the size of their manors. Almost everything, therefore, depended on the land : the king's army, the king's revenue (except the money which came from the fines and fees paid in the king's law-courts), the lords' revenues (except the fines paid in the lords' manorial court), the daily lives of the people.

This system lasted with only small changes for about two hundred years after 1086 ; but by the year 1300 larger changes had begun to operate. England

was no longer the country of Norman lords and Saxon peasants. The two races had become almost completely fused into one, with the same language, the same customs, the same outlook. England was becoming a great nation; it was engaging in wars with the French; it had sent thousands of men to the Crusades in the Eastern lands; it contained thousands of men who had been to France, to Italy, to Palestine; it had developed a very important trade with Flanders and France, especially in wool. All these activities were making England itself, as a whole, less self-contained and more anxious to get some of the good things which Frenchmen, Italians and Flemings already enjoyed. And just because England was becoming less self-contained, so the English manors were becoming less isolated and less self-contained. For all the foreign trade produced more home trade, and the development of trade meant that money—coined money, pieces of gold and silver—would play a much larger part in men's lives than it had ever done before. Indeed, as we have seen, most of the people of England in early Norman times hardly ever used money—in fact, hardly ever *saw* money. The king, the lords of manors, the freemen doubtless used money, but the villeins and serfs rarely had the chance to use it. But throughout the twelfth century money was becoming more and more usual, and by the year 1300 almost every one was using at least a little money every year. King Henry II. caused money to be used more frequently when he decided that, instead of asking his barons to come with their soldiers and fight for him as they were bound to do, he would require them in future to

pay him a sum of money about equal to the money it would cost each baron to bring his soldiers to the war. He called this sum of money "Scutage," and with it he was able to hire soldiers of the kind he desired without having to depend on the bodies of men, often poorly trained, whom the barons brought. The Crusades were another great cause of the increasing use of money. The barons who wanted to go to Jerusalem to save it from the Saracens, were compelled to get money with which to pay their expenses on the journey and during their stay in the Holy Land. King Richard's ransom had to be paid in money, and in order to raise the money *all* the people—villeins, freemen, barons—had to be taxed, and the tax was levied, not on the land a man held, but on the goods and chattels he possessed: in other words, every man had to find *money*.

But stop for a moment to think what the introduction of money would mean to a thirteenth-century manor where working-men were not paid wages for cultivating the land, but where working-men paid some one else for being allowed to use the land, and paid that some one else not in money but in week-work, boon-work, eggs, fowls, corn, lambs and pigs. Look at it first from the point of view of the lord of the manor. He desires his own fields to be well cultivated. Which will it be best for him to do? (1) To demand that *every* villein and serf, whether a good worker or not, shall come two days every week "to plough or sow, to reap or mow"? or (2) To say only to the *best* workers, "Come and work for me, and I'll give you wages in money"? Clearly

it would be more profitable for the lord to pay wages for hired labour, just as it was more profitable for King Henry II. to pay wages to hired soldiers than to have any men whom his barons brought. Then again, still looking at the question from the lord's point of view, suppose that the king is demanding money from the lord of the manor, how is the lord to get the money? Clearly he can get it only from the produce of his manor. But then, if everybody wants to sell produce, who is going to buy? This difficulty was overcome by the lord of the manor saying to his villein, "Now, John, look here! At present you have to work for me two days a week and you have to give me a part of your produce all the year round. In future you shall give me half the amount of produce and you shall pay me instead one shilling per year." To another villein he might say, "Rob, I shan't want you to work for me two days per week in future, but only for one day a week. But you must pay me instead two shillings per year." In these ways the lord obtained more money in addition to what he had already received by selling produce and by fining people who broke the customs of the manor.

Now look at the situation from the villein's point of view. Every week he has to give two or three whole days to the overlord. In addition, just when his own strips require to be ploughed, sown, or reaped, he has first to attend to the lord's land. Further, he has to send his customary amount of produce to the manor-house and to the church. To him it will be a great relief to be freed from the necessity of performing some of the usual and

oftentimes burdensome services which he owes to the overlord. If he receives wages for his labour he himself can hire other men to work for him while he is away. If he is allowed to pay a small sum of money per year instead of produce, he will perhaps be able to sell the food-stuffs which he and his family do not need, possibly to some of the serfs who have no land and are also beginning to sell their labour.

Thus, owing to the slowly increasing use of money, the lord is sometimes willing to receive money-*rent* instead of produce, and is often glad to employ *hired* labour instead of *forced* labour; on the other hand, the villein is glad to gain the slightly greater freedom which working for a wage allows him, and soon becomes very anxious to pay a rent instead of giving services and produce. In other words, he is glad to commute his labour services for a money payment; he would rather pay money than be forced to labour at the whim of the overlord. At the same time, therefore, there were two great changes very slowly but surely taking place on manors of the thirteenth century: (1) the king and the lords were beginning to demand money-rents for land; (2) the working-men were beginning to demand that they should be paid in money for their labour, and that they should not be compelled to labour for their overlords according to the customs of their manors. Expressing it differently, we may say that the land was ceasing to be the bond which united all the people, the foundation on which all was built. Instead of the land, *money* was beginning to be the link between the worker and the employer.

But the force of custom was very strong and

the changes went on very slowly. Only on a few manors was this "commutation of services for rent" used to any great extent. The lords were afraid of disturbing the ancient methods by which their manors were governed, and as yet there was no very pressing need for them to change those methods. The poor workers, on the other hand, were hardly in a position to know what was to their own advantage: they were uneducated; they were bound at every turn by the bonds of custom; they had few means of knowing what was happening on other manors; and there was little inducement to seek to alter the conditions of their work when they knew that the lord had not only the law on his side but also the power to punish them terribly if they were troublesome. Therefore only on a manor here and there was commutation of services for rent taking place.

The increasing use of money was undoubtedly slowly destroying the manorial system, and even if nothing else had happened, would gradually have undermined it. But that alone would have taken perhaps hundreds of years. Something more sudden and effective was required to hasten the decay of the system.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE BLACK DEATH

IN 1349 a terrible plague reached England. It had swept over Western Europe from the East, and the germs were no doubt carried by traders across the Straits of Dover to England. It was probably the same sort of horrible disease that occasionally kills so many thousands of people in India and China at the present time. The victims of it died within a very few hours; and in fourteenth-century England, where towns and villages were very insanitary, where there were no doctors, where there were few hospitals and those few of very little use, throughout the whole country the plague spread rapidly. Very few people who caught the disease recovered from it. In fact there can be little doubt that more than one-third of all the people of England were killed by it in a few months. One person in every three! Nowadays we think the death-rate is very high if one person in every fifty dies in one year. But in 1349 and the two following years the population of England fell from about 4,000,000 to about 2,500,000. It is almost impossible to realise what an immense difference such a huge loss of population made to all classes of people in England

at that time. Think of an English village of to-day where all the grown-up people are engaged in all kinds of work. Suppose the population of the village in the year of the plague was 300, of whom 120 were grown-up people, nearly all of whom were working on farms. Imagine now that the Black Death kills off in a few weeks one-third of the villagers—one-third of the men, women and children. There would then be only eighty grown-up people left to do the work on the farms even if all the women worked very hard as well as the men. Eighty people to do the work of a hundred and twenty! All the corn to be cut down, harvested, threshed, stored; all the cattle, sheep, pigs and fowls to be tended; all the corn to be ground, and perhaps the miller is dead of the plague; all the land to be prepared for next spring. How *can* the work be done if there are so few workers? And even if all the corn *is* gathered in, if all the animals *are* properly cared for, are they worth as much as before, now that there are fewer people who want them? It is no use sending to the next village, for the people there are just in the same plight. It is clear that a large part of the customary work could not be done; there were not enough people left alive to do it all. Much corn had to be left to rot in the fields; many of the animals were uncared for; and it really seemed as if ruin as well as disease had fallen upon the land.

We can imagine to some degree what would happen nowadays in English country districts if one-third of the population were killed, and we may be fairly sure that similar but worse things

happened on English manors in the years 1349, 1350, 1351. Let us look at the situation first from the point of view of the poorer workers, the villeins and serfs. Remember that these men have to pay to the lord of the manor not only a portion of their produce but also have to give him their labour for a certain number of days every week and for extra days at harvest, at ploughing-time, at seed-time. Suppose the manor we are looking at contained before the Black Death the same number of souls as the modern village we imagined—300 people, of whom 120 (60 men and 60 women) are grown up. Suppose 40 of these men are villeins, the other 20 men including the lord, the priest, the steward, and the other servants of the lord, the miller, and the other freemen. Possibly some of these latter are dead; perhaps the lord himself has been killed by the plague. But we are now concerned with the villeins, of whom, say, 14 have died of the plague. There now remain in 1351 only 26 villeins on a manor where in 1349 or 1350 there were 40. In the first place, it is clear that it will not be necessary to cultivate so much land as before: there are not so many mouths to feed, so that less corn will be needed. But the lord of the manor will *still* require his customary portion of the produce. The manor which in 1349 was sending him 50 hens and 640 eggs every year would still be expected to send the same amount even though there were only two-thirds of the people left to keep fowls. Similarly, the manor which had to send 10 bushels of corn to the lord would still be required to send

it. The custom of the manor was a set of hard rules which did not allow for the damage done by plagues.

The lord then was faced with something very like bankruptcy. His wealth had consisted very largely of the labour he could command his villeins to perform for him, and it was now reduced by a third. He could not get the customary amount of produce nor of service. What was perhaps more important, was that he had difficulty in getting even his own demesne lands cultivated. Faced by these serious difficulties, what did the lords of all the manors do? It would be obviously absurd to suppose that they all met their difficulties in the same way. Some were already paying wages to those villeins who had commuted, and these lords doubtless went on paying wages, sometimes at a higher rate, and so managed to get their lands tilled. Other lords had very rarely paid for hired labour; some of these no doubt began to do so; others most certainly refused to hire their villeins, and tried to force them to perform the services they were bound to render according to the customs of the manor. Some of the lords decided to persuade Parliament to pass laws compelling villeins to work under the old conditions. These laws were called *Statutes of Labourers*. We can see nowadays how absurd it was for Parliament to enact that wages should remain fixed; they might just as well have tried to stop the tides from ebbing and flowing by an Act of Parliament.

It is quite clear that if a sudden scarcity of workers

happens in any industry, the workers who remain are in a very good position for bargaining with their employer. The villeins soon saw that they themselves were masters of the situation. The work had to be done or food would fail ; the villeins were the only people to do it, and for the first time in English history the agricultural workers were able to say to the landlords, " Give us what we wish and we will work for you. If *you* don't give us what we wish, we will go to some lord who will." The lord doubtless very often retorted by calling in the Law to his aid. He tried to enforce the Statutes of Labourers ; he fined the obstinate villeins heavily in his manorial court ; he probably, in some cases, whipped and otherwise ill-treated the workers who refused to work for him. If he did, then the villeins packed up their few belongings in a bundle, and, with their families, fled to another part of the country, in spite of the laws against vagrants. On some manors the villeins formed a sort of union and went on strike, refusing to gather in the corn unless the lord granted their demands. Thus the lords as a whole were very soon at their wits' ends. They could whip, torture, extort if they were cruel and relentless : their villeins ran away. If they were gentler they had to pay wages ; in other words, they had to commute labour-services and customary dues for money. If they still could not get their land tilled, they handed it over to enterprising freemen or villeins on what was called a " stock-and-land lease," by which the tenant was given possession of a certain amount of land, a certain number of animals and implements, such as ploughs, for him

to hold freely for a fixed number of years ; every year he had to pay a rent to the landlord, and at the end of the term of years for which the land was let it had to be returned in good condition together with the same number of animals and implements.

Fortunately for the lords, but very unfortunately for the workers, there was yet another way in which the land could be used. For about a century before 1350 the number of sheep in England had been steadily increasing and there was thus more and more wool being produced in the country than the people required for their own clothing. This surplus wool, like most English wool, was of very good quality because the climate of England is very suitable for the production of wool. The famous weavers of Flanders soon found this out and began to buy English wool. This trade had steadily increased, and landlords, especially abbots and priors, had begun to find the trade in wool very profitable.

Hitherto most of the sheep had been fed on the demesne land and on the commonable waste, the moors and heathland which formed so large a part of so many manors. But now after 1351, some lords, who were unable to get even their demesne lands properly cultivated, began to turn those lands into sheep-runs, and even began to enclose some of the commonable waste. By turning their land into sheep-runs they could do without a large number of workmen ; for flocks of sheep require only a few shepherds, whereas ploughlands require many men. By enclosing the common pasture lands they made it harder for the cattle and sheep of the villagers to find food. Thus in both ways the villeins suffered

from this enclosure movement : there was less demand for their labour, and there was also less chance for them to produce food for themselves.

Is it very surprising therefore, that throughout almost the whole of England there was very great misery and distress, very serious discontent and a feeling of restlessness amongst the people ? It is quite clear that the Black Death was very largely the immediate cause of this ; for it had hastened the decay of the manorial system ; it had compelled more landlords to grant, and enabled more villeins to demand money-payments ; it had caused both lords and villeins to break the rigid customs of the manors which had for so long retarded progress ; it had produced circumstances which made the manorial system no longer able to supply the needs of the country now that it had a foreign trade in wool.

The rate at which the manorial system henceforth decayed was very rapid, and all rapid social changes of this kind always bring with them a vast amount of misery and poverty for the poorest classes. It was so in this case, and, very unfortunately, the distress was increased by political events.

King Edward III. gloried in warfare ; he had determined to conquer France, no matter what it cost. In spite of the terrible troubles caused by the Black Death, he still went on demanding money from Parliament. He taxed the wool merchants heavily ; he induced all who could to pay him money in order to hire soldiers to go to France. At the death of this vainglorious and showy king in 1377, England was seriously impoverished, and the discontent,

especially amongst the poorest classes, was becoming very evident. It was increased by the large numbers of roistering, brutal, idle soldiers who, now that the French wars were over for a time, returned to England and often became sturdy beggars and wandering thieves, who tried to live in England, just as they had lived for years in the land of their enemies, by plundering, drinking, fighting and idling.

But even though the country was now very poor, money had still to be found by Parliament and by the guardians of the young King Richard II. in order to govern the country. All the old ways of taxation had been tried and very little money had resulted. It almost looked as if the kingdom itself was bankrupt. Then in 1379 the rulers of England in despair decided, after a long discussion, that every adult person in the land should be called upon to pay a sum of money according to his means. This was called a poll-tax (the word *poll* means *a head*), and it was hoped that it would produce £50,000. Every effort was made to make the tax a fair one, by making the rich pay more than the poor. For example, the Duke of Lancaster had to pay ten marks while the villeins and labourers had to pay only fourpence. Unfortunately the proceeds of this tax were only about £22,000. The following year another poll-tax was levied; but this time it was to be at the rate of three groats for every person (save beggars) above the age of fifteen years. There can be little doubt that the richer people thought the poorer folk had not paid their fair share of the former taxation, and that they hoped, by fixing the



tax at three groats per head, to make every one contribute. Yet even now an attempt was made to make the tax a fair one, by the order that in each township the wealthier should help the poorer ; so that if the total sum received from each township or parish averaged three groats per head no questions would be asked as to how much each had contributed. Naturally, where there were wealthy people, the poor would be asked to pay less than three groats per head ; but in the poorest districts the full amount was necessary. Imagine how severely the tax would press on the villein with four or five unmarried daughters all over fifteen years of age. For himself, his wife and children, he would have to pay three groats each ; and when it is remembered that a groat (fourpence) of those days would be about equal to 6s. 8d. of our money, it will easily be seen that it was almost impossible for a poor man to find at once a sum equal to £5 or £6 of our money.

Of course the collectors did not gather the amount that was expected. Very large numbers of men all over the country, when asked for the number of people in their family, told the collectors or their agents very wrong numbers ; some didn't count their daughters, their widowed aunts, mothers or sisters. Many of the lists contained only the married men and women. It was quite clear therefore that throughout the greater part of England the people had tried to defraud the king and to evade taxation.

The king's ministers were very angry, and, in March 1381, they ordered a fresh collection to be

made ; the former collectors and agents were not to be trusted, so " commissioners " were appointed who were to go throughout the land (something like the commissioners who made *Domesday Book*). They were to *count* the people for themselves, and compare the numbers with those on the fraudulent lists already sent in. The result was astounding. In Norfolk 8000 persons, in Suffolk 13,000, had not been counted ; and other counties were nearly as bad.

Imagine the anger of the people who were thus found out, when they were compelled to pay after all. Imagine too how angry the king's commissioners would become as they discovered fraud after fraud. Then too remember that the country was already full of discontent, poverty, distress ; and it will be easily understood that the bitter feeling caused by this strict collection of the poll-tax was really very dangerous.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PEASANTS' REVOLT, 1381

AT the end of May 1381, one of the king's commissioners, Thomas Bampton, with his sergeants rode to Brentwood in Essex to check the number of people in the district who ought to pay poll-tax. But the villagers refused to pay another penny; and, when Bampton ordered their spokesman to be seized, the little crowd of about a hundred began to throw stones and soon chased Master Bampton and his men out of the town. Of course the king's ministers had to deal with this riot, especially as it was so near to London. So Judge Robert Belknap was ordered to go to Brentwood, to find the rioters and punish them.

In the meantime the Essex men had been roused by messengers, and when, on June 1st, the famous judge appeared, a great army of angry men rushed upon him, and terrified him into swearing that he would never try to judge such cases again. Three of his clerks they beat to death, and three other men who were with him they beheaded.

On June 2nd there was a similar army of desperate men in Kent, and by June 6th several thousands of poor desperate Kentishmen had begun to attack towns. They gained Rochester and Maid-

stone, where they chose to be their leader a man named Wat Tyler, of whom very little is known. He appears to have been an Essex man who had been a soldier in the French wars. Perhaps that was why he was chosen to be the leader of the Kentish army, which was badly in need of a leader who knew something about war. At any rate, their leader he became, and on the whole he led his men better than might have been expected. For he was such a good talker, so sharp-witted and so quick to act, that before long he seems to have gained the confidence of the wild multitude which followed him.

On the 10th his army of poor and often ragged men, armed with hatchets, scythes, sticks, old swords, bows and arrows, captured Canterbury, sacked the archbishop's palace, and beheaded three citizens who were supposed to be "traitors." The next day Tyler led his army towards London, where he hoped to seize the king. But many of the worst of his men remained behind in Canterbury to plunder houses and to terrify rich people into giving them money.

The next day Tyler's army reached Maidstone, and there the famous "mad priest of Kent," John Ball, joined the rioters. He had been imprisoned several times for preaching against the bishops and the Pope, and had been released from the archbishop's prison at the capture of Canterbury. He was a very eloquent preacher, with a manner and style that appealed strongly to the poorer classes. He attacked the wealth of the Church; he believed the Church to be ruled by thoroughly

wicked men who cared only for wealth and luxury ; he believed that a time was coming when there would be no distinction between rich and poor, and all his preaching was devoted to hastening that time. It is quite clear that he must have been a man with a passionate sense of justice ; a deeply religious man who hated to see poverty and misery ; whose heart was full of sympathy for the poor and the oppressed. Perhaps he was not very wise in his methods of preaching, and no doubt he thought that sorrow and misery could be removed by ways which we now know to be useless ; but he was certainly a good man. Here is a copy of one of the strange letters which he sent round by messengers from village to village on scraps of parchment :—

“ John Schepe, sometime St. Mary's priest of York, and now of Colchester, greeteth well John Nameless, and John the Miller, and John the Carter, and biddeth them that they beware of guile in borough, and stand together in God's name ; and biddeth Piers Plowman go to his work and chastise Hob the Robber, and take with you John Trueman and his fellows and no mo : and look that ye shape you to one head and no mo.”

This letter evidently urges all men who read it to rise in rebellion together and attack Hob the Robber (Sir Robert Hales, the King's Treasurer, who was supposed to be responsible for the hated poll-tax).

By June 12th the strange wild army had reached Blackheath, where they were in sight of London. Some had actually pushed on to Southwark and Lambeth, where they set fire to the archbishop's

palace and several prisons. By this time too the Essex men had captured Colchester, and had marched to Mile End, where they also encamped in sight of London.

The people in the city seem to have been too terrified to offer any defence ; yet very likely if the rebels had been attacked by a few hundred well-armed knights and citizens they would easily have been routed. As it was, their courage and daring were increased, especially by a sermon which John Ball preached that morning. His text was :—

“When Adam delved and Eve span,  
Who was then the gentleman ?”

This was just the kind of text to appeal to the discontented crowd before him, and it may easily be imagined how excited the rioters became as the eloquent John Ball talked of how, in the beginning, all men were equal ; and that therefore it was not God's will for some men, like the wicked judges, bishops and lords, to be rich and powerful while others were poor and wretched. Think how the multitude must have cheered when the preacher told them that now they had a chance of fighting for God's will, by making all men equal again, by striking down the rich and the powerful. When he ended, the great eager crowd shouted that John Ball should be their archbishop and their chancellor.

Soon afterwards Tyler led his army to London Bridge, which was opened for them by some of the Londoners who sympathised with them. What Tyler wished at first was only to capture and punish

the Duke of Lancaster, the archbishop and the treasurer. He led his men to the duke's palace, which was soon sacked and burnt. None of the rioters was allowed to take anything of its rich and beautiful contents for himself; one man indeed, who was caught trying to steal a silver goblet, was hanged at once as a warning that not plunder, and not riches, but vengeance and justice, were to be the aims of the rebels. Unfortunately the army contained many men who knew little and cared less about discipline and justice; many of them were loafers, brutal soldiers who had lived lives of plunder and vice in the French wars, beggars and ne'er-do-wells who were eager for any chance of gaining something without working for it. Many of them made themselves drunk on the wine they took from the cellars of the palace and became dangerous, furious robbers.

From the Savoy Palace the army went to the Temple where all the hated lawyers lived. This too was pillaged and burned. A few lawyers were caught and killed, so too were several Flemings. By nightfall the greater part of London was in the hands of the crowd, and the king, surrounded by his frightened advisers, could see from the Tower of London the blazing buildings and could hear the shouting and the screams.

What could be done? Attack the rebels at once, while they were worn out with plundering? or try to meet the leaders and win them over with fine promises? To attack at night was dangerous; and, besides, many of the Londoners were on the side of the rebels. So it was decided that the king

should arrange to meet the rebels the next day at Mile End.

Now this was exactly what Tyler and the other leaders had wanted for several days. The best men of the rioters were so thoroughly convinced of the justice of their demands, and so convinced that the king would be their best friend if only they could see him face to face without the intervention of lords, bishops and lawyers, that they had drawn up a list of grievances which they wished to give to the king himself. Many of them felt sure that then the young king would be on their side; would in fact himself be their leader and would help them to rid the country of the wicked men who impoverished it in his name. Thus when King Richard rode out to Mile End, accompanied by a few hundred gentlemen, a great unruly crowd surged round him begging him to give them Treasurer Hales and other hated people. Soon however the king and Tyler were face to face; the rebel leader spoke eloquently of the grievances of the poor people, and his demands show clearly enough some of the chief causes of the rebellion. He asked the king to do away with serfdom, to abolish all labour services and so make it easy for each villein to pay a money rent for his lands. He demanded that the king should make all markets free, so that people might buy and sell as they chose without having to pay heavy market-tolls or to conform to elaborate market-laws. Finally, he demanded that the king should issue pardons to all people who had taken part in this great revolt.



All these things the king promised to do. Immediately he ordered thirty clerks to begin to write out these pardons, and thousands of the simple-hearted peasants as soon as they had received the scraps of parchment began to troop away home again, believing that all was well and that they had gained all they had fought for.

But when Wat Tyler, doubtless growing bolder with success, also presented to the king a long list of famous men who were to be handed over to the rebels who would then punish them, the king, without definitely refusing, showed clearly enough that he did not intend to surrender these men. The rebels, however, were determined to punish their enemies, and, while the king and his officials were issuing charters, Tyler led a band of men to the Tower, into which the captain of the guard actually admitted them without striking a blow. They soon found Archbishop Sudbury and Treasurer Hales, who were praying in the beautiful Norman chapel in the White Tower. Both were very cruelly and brutally murdered and their heads stuck on poles to be carried round the city as trophies.

Naturally the sight of these gruesome heads excited the rioters more and more, and for the rest of that day and all through the night the wildest scenes were taking place. The London mob itself led the rebels to hunt out unpopular men. Over two hundred foreigners were murdered and scores of Englishmen, especially lawyers and known supporters of the Duke of Lancaster. Many houses were plundered and fired, and hundreds of innocent people maltreated.

In terror the king's advisers urged him to meet Tyler once more, this time at Smithfield. There the boy-king, accompanied only by some 200 followers, faced the great unruly army of about 30,000. Tyler was again the spokesman. He shook hands with the king and then began to say that there were still many more things which must be granted. First the game-laws (against poaching) must be abolished. There must be no law save the law of Winchester. No man must be outlawed. The estates of the Church must be confiscated and divided up. There must be only one bishopric. All men shall be equally free.

Evidently this is only a confused jumble of ideas. It is equally clear that the people's leaders did not really know what they wanted; and even more clear that it was quite impossible for the king or any one else, even if he had been as wise as Solomon and as powerful as Alexander the Great, to do any of the things he was now asked to do. No ruler can make a new heaven and a new earth by merely saying "Let it be so."

King Richard naturally told Tyler that he would do all he could for the people. Tyler was not satisfied with this answer and began to behave violently.

A Kentishman amongst the king's followers suddenly said quite loudly some such words as—"Why! I know the man. He is one of the worst thieves and robbers in Kent!"

Tyler heard these words and shouted to him "Come here you!" and, when the man stood still, the rebel captain rushed at him with a drawn

dagger. But Walworth, the Mayor of London, interposed and threatened to arrest Tyler for drawing a weapon in the king's presence. Tyler then tried to stab Walworth ; but the mayor wore a coat of mail under his gown and drawing his sword, struck Tyler hard on the shoulder. Another of the king's men then stabbed Tyler twice and the rebel rolled from his horse.

The king and his followers were then in terrible danger. The rioters levelled their arrows and were just going to shoot when King Richard spurred his horse forward and cried, "Sirs, will you shoot your king? I will be your chief and your captain. I will give you all you need. But follow me to the fields out there."

Then the people, perhaps remembering the justice of their cause and how they had always believed in the king, lowered their weapons and followed him to the open fields, wondering what he would do.

In the meantime Walworth galloped back into the city and began to gather armed men who hated the rebels, their murders, their robberies, their horrible deeds. Soon he had several thousand followers, whom he led out to help the king. They found Richard bravely arguing with John Ball and the other leaders, and it seems clear that the clever boy was very much impressed by what he had found out during his strange argument. For when Walworth brought out his men and some one urged the king to attack the mob at once, Richard cried angrily, "Most of these poor folk have been led here by fear and threats. I will not have

the innocent suffer for the guilty." He simply told the multitude to depart, and the people immediately began to scatter in all directions, many of them praising and blessing the king.

As far as London was concerned the revolt was pacified. A few leading rebels were seized and hanged, and then the king led an army northwards into Essex.

For while Wat Tyler and his men had been terrorising London, the eastern and east midland counties had been at least equally terrorised by other armies of rioters led by men some of whom seem to have been far abler than Tyler. In Essex the king was met by a band of peasants, who begged him to confirm the pardons he had issued to them at Mile End. Evidently the poor simple villeins had begun to realise that their scraps of parchment had only been issued as a trick to get the rioters to disperse. Now the king showed that their suspicions were correct, for he said, "Villeins ye shall remain!" His promises to Wat Tyler were all going to be broken, and the Essex men gathered to fight for their liberty. A battle was fought near Billericay. Is it surprising to learn that about five hundred of the ill-armed, undisciplined villeins were killed there and many of the rest hunted down by the king's trained fighters? Afterwards over a hundred men were arrested, tried and executed. Amongst them was John Ball, the good "mad priest of Kent," who even at the gallows could not see that he was in any way blameworthy, or that he had done anything to be pardoned for.

Thus the rebellion in Essex was suppressed. In

Suffolk the leader was John Wraw, who had been the vicar of Ringsfield, near Beccles. He had, it is said, been with Tyler in Kent and London, and on June 12th set up the "banner of the common people" in Suffolk. Soon he was joined by hundreds of rioters, who had evidently been told to be ready. The little riotous army immediately marched to attack the manor of Richard Lyons (a financier who was murdered by Tyler in London a day or two later). Then they marched to Bury St. Edmunds, where they helped the townsmen to sack the abbey and murder the prior, as well as Sir John Cavendish, the Chief Justice of the King's Bench. Then for about a week John Wraw ruled the district round Bury. The eastern part of Suffolk was similarly ruled by another vicar, John Battisford, assisted by a rich farmer, Thomas Sampson.

In Norfolk the people were roused by agitators who galloped from village to village urging the people "to rise against the Crown and the laws of England."

Their leader was Geoffrey Litster, a dyer who would probably have been a great man in other circumstances. He had real ability and ruled his army very well. His chief supporter was Sir Roger Bacon, who seems to have been the dyer's faithful officer. Litster gained possession of the rich city of Norwich with little difficulty and allowed his followers to sack only a few houses belonging to unpopular citizens. That night the clever dyer made four captured knights wait on him at table. He called himself the "King of the Commons" and organised his men so well that he soon had

the whole of eastern Norfolk under control. He sent out bands of men to sack manor-houses, and especially to bring back any parchments they could find, particularly court-rolls and manorial records. All these were burned so that in future no villein or serf would be faced with written evidence as to what his labour services were !

But the reign of this " King of the Commons " was short ; for Henry Despenser, the Bishop of Norwich, was near. The bishop, a real fighting bishop, hearing of the terrible rebellions, had hurried with a small escort of about thirty to protect his own diocese. On the way he had severely defeated, first, some rebels who were attacking Peterborough ; second, a strong body which had seized Ramsey Abbey ; third, the rioters who had seized and terrorised Cambridge ; and when he arrived at Norwich he heard that Litster had that very morning led his army to North Walsham, where he had strongly entrenched himself and awaited the bishop's attack. The next day Despenser did attack—was himself the first man to cut his way through the fences with which Litster had protected his front. The result of the furious charge was the complete defeat of the peasants, many of whom were killed and many captured. The " King of the Commons " was taken and hanged ; but the bishop first confessed him and gave him absolution.

Thus the rebellion in the eastern counties was crushed, and the great revolt which had convulsed Kent and East Anglia, which had more or less disturbed Surrey, Hertford, Hampshire, Sussex, Somerset and the east of Yorkshire was now

practically over. Hundreds of poor peasants had been killed ; scores of gentry-folk had been murdered or robbed ; scores of manor-houses had been burned and sacked ; hundreds of manor-rolls had been destroyed. No doubt many lords of manors had been terrified by the sudden uprising of the common people, and had been made a little more careful how they treated their villeins. But still the old system went on. Many lords seem to have been even more severe with their tenants after the revolt than before, and it is very doubtful whether the poor as a whole gained much by their rebellion, save that it rapidly became easier to get work for money-wages.

## CHAPTER VI

### SHEEP-FARMING AND THE WOOL TRADE

THE manorial system, as we have seen, was decaying long before 1381; perhaps the decay went on a little more rapidly owing to the insurrection. But the real cause of the decay was the growth of sheep-farming, which the landlords found to be much more profitable and far less troublesome than trying to make unwilling villeins "plough and sow, reap and mow," or do the many other kinds of work that are required in cultivating the land. The Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt, therefore, actually helped to teach the landlords how to make more profit and how to do without labour-services—boon-work and week-work.

Picture once more a mediæval manor. Remember that it consisted of—

1. The lord's demesne-land.
2. The three open-fields cultivated in strips.
3. The commonable waste, on which all the tenants could turn their animals for pasture.

If the lord's demesne-land was in one compact estate, he could easily turn it into pasture-land when he wished. He would be taking work and the chance of earning money and food from a large number of villagers, but the law said it was his



own land and therefore he could do as he liked with it. The workers for whom he had no need could pay more attention to their own strips of land, or, if they had none, could go away to work for some one else. In the same way, if the lord was making good profit from the wool of his sheep he need not stay on his manor. He could draw the money and live where he liked, whereas formerly it was often to his interest to remain where his land produced his foods.

Thus even if only demesne-land was enclosed, many of the poor villagers suffered badly.

But suppose the lord also cast greedy eyes on the commonable waste. Suppose he was so anxious to get wide sheep-runs that he decided to put fences round some of the land on which his villagers largely depended for pasturage, for hay, for firewood. He had actually been empowered to do this by a law called the Statute of Merton (1235) and many lords in the fifteenth century actually did put fences round large portions of the commonable waste. The fences were usually intended not only to keep the lord's sheep *in*, but also to keep out the sheep, pigs, cattle and goats of the villagers, as well as the villagers themselves. According to the law, the lord had to leave enough commonable waste for his tenants to use. But who was to say what was enough? Often the lord decided everything for himself, and the villagers had to take what they could get. It is hardly surprising therefore that hundreds of villagers were ruined. They could not make a living out of their strips without the use of large commons for

pasturage. They could struggle on for a time trying to make ends meet, but sooner or later they would have to give up ; some would become homeless labourers, some drifted to the towns.

But there were still the open-fields. What would happen if these were enclosed too? The lord might say to all his tenants, "Look here, my friends, don't you think it would be better for me to have all *my* strips in a compact piece up there in the north field? And wouldn't it be better too for all of you to have your strips altogether?" If the enclosure and redistribution were done fairly, no doubt most of the villagers profited. Unfortunately, in hundreds of villages the redistribution was not done fairly. Thousands of villeins were robbed of their small holdings and evicted during the period from 1450 to 1550. In fact the matter came to be so serious, there came to be so many homeless wanderers, so many empty decayed villages, that the king and his Parliament actually began to try to stop further enclosures. In 1489 Parliament passed an Act "against the pulling down of tounes." In 1517 a great inquiry was made, and it was found that owing to the enclosure of land for sheep-farming whole villages had been broken up, the houses pulled down, the churches allowed to fall into ruin, the inhabitants scattered.

But Acts of Parliament and Proclamations by the king could not stop rich men from desiring to be richer, could not prevent the land being used for sheep-farming, could not prevent a landlord saying to his tenants, "Go away! I don't want you and I do want sheep!" So enclosures continued to

be made and people to be turned off the land for nearly a hundred and fifty years. When landlords ceased to make enclosures it was not because of Acts of Parliament or because they saw how much distress was being caused. They ceased merely because it no longer paid them to produce more and more wool.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries English wool was considered to be by far the best in Europe. The famous weavers of Flanders would pay very high prices for it ; and since these Flemish weavers could not be beaten in the making of fine woollen cloth, they were almost always short of wool, especially of the best kinds. Thus it was that the English wool trade with Flanders became by far the most important trade England had ever had. In fact English wool was so much desired by the Flemings that our King Edward III. was able to keep them friendly and to make them help him in his wars against the French merely by threatening them with the loss of English wool. The king, too, seeing how profitable and useful the trade was, tried in every possible way to increase it. One of his chief reasons for doing so was that he was entitled to levy a tax on every bale of wool or of cloth ; he saw that the more wool there was going to Flanders the more money there would be for himself from the duties levied on the exports and imports.

Is it very wonderful therefore that Englishmen who held large tracts of land should do their utmost to turn it into sheep-runs ; should try their hardest to get more and more land for the same purpose ? There was what we should call " a boom " in sheep-

farming ; just as in the nineteenth century we had a "railway boom" and in the twentieth century a "rubber boom."

But booms are generally followed by "slumps." The "slump" in sheep-farming came about the middle of the sixteenth century (1550), and it was caused largely by the facts—(1) that other countries had begun to produce large quantities of good wool ; (2) that other places than Flanders had become famous for weaving. The English weavers themselves had acquired much of the skill of the Flemings, many of whom had migrated to England. There had indeed grown up in England the idea that it was wrong for Englishmen to buy clothes made in foreign countries. There had arisen the cry "Support home industries." Something of the spirit behind that cry can be seen in the Peasants' Revolt when the rioters murdered every Fleming they could capture. But by the time of Henry VII. the cry had become a great popular movement, so that on May Day 1517 there was a furious riot in London of workmen and apprentices, who killed a large number of foreigners because they believed them to be robbing Englishmen of their work.

For these reasons, amongst others, the demand for English wool slackened, and most of the enclosures of land which took place after 1550 were made fairly and often by agreement amongst the tenants themselves. Moreover most of these enclosures were made, not to create more sheep-runs, but in order to get more plough-land. For the population of England had been increasing steadily ; more

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food was required and it now became almost, if not quite, as profitable to grow corn as to rear sheep.

But the results of "the boom" in sheep-farming had been very great and very far-reaching.

1. It had created a great national woollen industry. It had made England a nation of sheep-owners and weavers.
2. It had provided the king with enormous revenues.
3. It had enriched hundreds of landowners and traders; and had made many monasteries very wealthy.
4. It had made the use of money much more common, especially in the payment of rents and wages.
5. It had broken up the manorial system and practically banished serfdom and villeinage. Thus it had in many districts (especially the eastern and south-eastern counties) changed the appearance of the countryside. Instead of the "oases of arable in wildernesses of waste"; instead of the three great open-fields of strips of the year 1250, we should have seen three hundred years later, in many parts, the same church, perhaps the same bridge and manor-house and demesne, but the waste partly cleared and fenced round; the open-fields no longer in strips, but marked out in squares and rough parallelograms by hedges and ditches much as they are now.

But it must be carefully remembered that only

a small part of the whole land was enclosed during the three centuries 1300-1500. There still remained thousands of open-field villages with their strips, their commons, their customs and traditions. These were to remain for almost another three hundred years.

6. It had destroyed many old villages, driven thousands of poor people from their homes and made many thousands of others dependent on their money-earnings.
7. It had produced a large class of people who gained their living partly by cultivating a few acres of land and partly by spinning wool or weaving cloth in their own homes with the aid of their wives and children.

“ His coat of the cloth that is named carry-marry (a coarse cloth) ;  
His hood full of holes, with his hair sticking through them ;  
His clumsy knobbed shoes cobbled over so thickly,  
Yet his toes started out, as he trod on the ground ;  
His hose hanging over each side of his hoppers  
All plashed in the puddles as he followed the plough ;  
His two miserable mittens made out of old rags,  
The fingers worn out and the filth clotted on them.  
He went wading in mud, almost up to the ankles,  
And before him four oxen, so weary and feeble  
One could reckon their ribs, so rueful were they.  
His wife walked beside him, with a long ox-goad,  
In a clouted coat cut short to the knee  
Wrapped in a winnowing-sheet to keep out the weather.  
Her bare feet on the bleak ice bled as she went,  
At one end of the acre, in a crumb-bowl so small,  
A little babe lay, lapped up in rags,  
And twins, two-years-old, tumbled beside it,  
All singing one song that was sorrowful hearing,  
For they all cried one cry, a sad note of care.”

*William Langland's Description of a Ploughman and  
his Family* (date about 1380).

## PART II

### TOWNS AND GILDS



#### CHAPTER I

##### THE PEOPLE IN THE TOWNS (1066-1550)

TOWNS have had their origin in many ways, but most old English towns have a history something like the following.

I. First they were probably manorial villages with their lord, his steward, the freemen, the villeins and the serfs. Perhaps owing to their situation at a ford over a river (like Oxford) or at the crossing of main roads they gained an importance of their own as centres where the people of other manors around might sell their produce and buy other articles which they needed. The village would then become a market and would require certain market rules if the buying and selling was to be done fairly. Some of the very earliest laws of Saxon kings in the ninth and tenth centuries are about markets, and make rules as to how sales and purchases shall be conducted. For example, here is a translation of a law of the tenth century —



“ We have ordained that no man buy any property worth more than 20 pence, except in the market ; and in the market he must buy in the presence of the market-reeve or of another trustworthy man.”

This was to stop fraudulent dealings, by always having a witness to the sale of valuable things like animals. In this way it was made harder for a man to steal, say, a cow, for he would have to bring a witness to show he bought it.

Thus even by such market-laws the village would become a special place, more important than a mere manorial village.

But the lord of the manor would also, very naturally, demand some control over the market. Some part at least of the gains of his tenants he would claim. The manor was *his* manor, therefore the market was his ; and no one from another manor should use it without paying him market-tolls. In order to get his tolls some organisation was necessary ; the lord must appoint officials to collect them.

On the other hand the villagers would say, “ We must keep a careful eye on the lord’s toll-collectors to see that they do not extort more than their due. Not only that, we must keep a careful eye on people who come from other places to buy and sell. We must have officials of our own to see that we are not cheated, and to keep the stranger in order.”

Thus both on the lord’s side and on the villagers’ side a closer organisation was necessary whenever a village became a market. As a result, the village not only became bigger and more prosperous but

the people in it became more closely knit together for the common good. The villagers, or as we may now call them, the townsmen, would still go on cultivating their strips in the open-fields, still go on pasturing their cattle on the commonable waste, still go on performing their labour-services if they were villeins or serfs. But on market-days they were a little more than tenants of a manor. They were townsmen, and amongst them was an increasing proportion of men whose living depended less and less on the land and more and more on occupations like those of the carter, the miller, the wheelwright, the carpenter, the smith, the tailor, the leather-maker. For at a market-centre these men would be specially needed, if only for repairs.

But often something else besides a convenient situation at a ford or at cross-roads was needed to make a market centre into a market town. That something was either a castle or a monastery—the castle of a powerful overlord who could protect the market from being raided by the followers of a neighbouring chief; or a monastery which would not only require to buy and sell much produce, but would also, by its very presence, give a security and prestige to the marketing which took place under its walls. Often indeed important towns grew up merely because of the presence of a castle or an abbey. But as a rule, if we look into the history of old towns we shall find that most of them owe their origin to a combination of the causes we have mentioned. Oxford, for example, became a town not only because one of the few fords over the Thames is there, not only because ancient roads converged on to that

ford ; but also because that ford was guarded by a strong fortress from very early Saxon days onwards. Nottingham became important partly because of the ford across the Trent, partly because the ford was easily guarded by the fortress on the great castle rock. Bury St. Edmunds and St. Albans became famous towns largely because of their great monasteries.

II. But the presence of a great fortress or of a monastery (which was often used as a fortress) was not without its disadvantages. Too often the lord, whether a churchman or not, was unfair in his dealings with the townsmen. Sometimes he would abuse the great power he had ; he might raid and plunder the market ; he might charge excessive tolls or inflict unjust fines ; he might even refuse to allow a market one year just in order to punish his townsmen. Naturally, therefore, it was not long before the townsmen began to seek some way by which they could gain sole control over the market. In other words, they had to make it profitable to the lord to give up interfering with the market. They could do this only by paying him annually a sum of money which would compensate him for all the tolls and dues which he usually received from the market. If the townsmen could strike a bargain with the lord, they would demand in return for their annual payment a piece of parchment, *a charter*, on which was written the agreement between the lord and his townfolk.

Luckily for the townsmen William the Conqueror had decided that most of the towns should belong

to him. In *Domesday Book* they are often called *terra regis* (king's land), and in almost every case a careful account is given in the great book of what each town is worth and how much it should pay to the king. If any abbot or bishop or nobleman has an interest in the town, *Domesday Book* shows how much that interest is worth. A few towns, like York, Bury St. Edmunds and St. Albans, seem to have belonged entirely to the bishop or abbot. Coventry belonged half to the bishop, half to the Earl of Chester. You will remember that we gave *Doomsday Book's* account of Oxford and this will serve as an example.

Now if the townsmen had only the king to bargain with, matters were fairly easy, especially if, as so often happened, the king wanted money very badly. The townsmen would send a deputation to the king begging for a charter and offering to pay him yearly a sum of money in return. A bargain would be struck and the deputation of worthy townsmen would return home bearing the precious piece of parchment with the king's seal dangling from it. Here is a translation of the charter bought by the men of Helston from King John.

John, By the Grace of God, etc. etc.

" Know that we have granted and by this our charter have confirmed that our town of Helleston shall be a free town and that our burgesses of this town shall have a gild-merchant and shall be free from tolls throughout our realm ; whether the tolls be for crossing a bridge or using a road or for having a stall in a market or for loading a ship or for the use of the soil. . . . We grant also to them that their law-cases concerning the matters and tenures of their town

shall be heard only within the walls of their own town, excepting cases relating to our Crown and to other lands.

"We desire also that they shall have all the other privileges and free customs which our burgesses of the fortress of Launceston had in the time of our father King Henry so that none of the aforesaid burgesses shall have these liberties unless he resides in the town of Helleston."

*(Then follow the names of the great men who were witnesses to the charter ; the date, the place where the King was ; then the Royal Seal.)*

The men of Helston had in fact gained the right to regulate their own trade and to be free from many expensive and vexatious tolls, as well as the right to govern themselves.

But if several overlords, often including the king, had to be bought off, the matter was often very difficult to arrange. Sometimes the overlord could only be induced to sell a charter when he had no other means of raising money. In this way the Crusades were very useful to English towns ; for so many lords wanted to raise money in order to go on a crusade to the Holy Land that they were often glad to sell their rights over their towns. But frequently it happened that a lord steadily refused to sell his very profitable rights.

At Coventry, for example, the townsmen were able to get a charter from the Earl of Chester without much difficulty. But the bishop who owned the other half of the town refused for a long time even to negotiate with his people. Hence for one half of the town there was one kind of government and for the other half a different kind. A man could in some cases not be punished on one side of the main street of the city for what he had done on the other side.

After many quarrels and troubles, however, Coventry bought out the bishop too and then was able to manage its own affairs. In some cases, however, the lords, especially if they were abbots, refused to allow their towns to have self-government, refused to grant full charters. For that very reason the monasteries at Bury St. Edmunds and St. Albans were so ruthlessly attacked and plundered by the rioters of 1381.

Fortunately the great majority of English towns had gained their charters long before that date. It was about the year 1150 that our towns began to desire self-government. By that time English trade had increased enormously; the Normans had introduced new trades, new demands and new methods; and by the middle of the twelfth century many towns had become large and prosperous. How were these towns to be governed? How were these markets to be managed? Were the old Anglo-Saxon courts to rule the towns, or were the private courts of the overlord to be supreme? Was it to be the town-moot? or was it to be the hall-moot?

Luckily the townsmen in their bargainings with their overlords had some very good examples to follow. Many of the towns of Normandy had already gained self-government by buying out their overlords; and Englishmen were not slow to learn from the Normans amongst them who knew of these events. In particular they learned the details of the charter gained by the town of Breteuil, and, before long, in one or two towns the leaders were trying to buy from their overlords charters modelled on that of Breteuil. As soon as

the news spread, other towns were eager to have similar charters, and so for about two hundred years (1180-1350) we find town after town trying to get a charter like that of some other town. Helston, for example, wanted one like that of Launceston. Such charters were sold readily by weak and needy kings like Stephen, John or Henry III., and it was in their reigns that most of the towns gained their freedom.

But *how* did they manage their business? Having got their charter, how did they regulate their markets? Evidently this was the most serious problem of all. Who was going to be responsible for the collection of tolls, for the enforcement of rules and of good order? So far the townsmen were organised in wards, each with an alderman, for little more than the purposes of warfare and of the law-courts. Evidently as trade increased, as more of the townsmen came to depend for their living on what they made with their hands—clothing, tools, ornaments, weapons—they would begin to feel the need of some organisation to regulate trade. They would require officers to see that no fraud in the quality or quantity of goods was committed; to arrange all the details and rules of buying and selling, the collection of tolls and fines. They would need some organisation to represent and protect their interests as inhabitants of their town against the inhabitants of other towns.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GILDS

I. PICTURE for a moment once more the manorial village under the shadow of the castle or the abbey, before the village becomes a town or even a market. By far the majority of the men work on the land, but there are a few craftsmen. But it is clear that in so small a community there will probably be only one smith, one carpenter, one mason and so on. The one smith will do each bit of work to suit the needs of each customer who will be his near neighbour, and the payment for the work will probably be so many eggs, or hens, or measures of corn. The smith will have few, perhaps no nails or chains or axes ready-made ; he will simply have no customers for them. Then, again, every one of his customers lives probably within a stone's-throw of his little forge ; if he does bad work, he will be injuring possibly a friend, and at any rate a man with whom he has to live. Thus the artisan in such a village has no rules, no prices, no fixed hours or wages. In many an old English village to-day there is a " handy-man " who works in a similar sort of friendly way.

II. But as the village becomes a market and a town, more smiths will be required. Perhaps



seven or eight of them will be able to get a good living. Naturally competition will arise amongst them; but still the greater number of the customers will be friends of the smiths, and the smiths themselves will be friends of each other and very often relations. And since the whole spirit of the early Middle Ages was against any kind of underselling or any kind of profit-making; since the ideal of the time was "a fair exchange," the seven or eight smiths would be expected first, not to cheat each other, not to rob each other of customers by doing cheap work; and, second, not to cheat customers either by telling lies about the quality of the nails, axes and ploughshares, or by agreeing amongst themselves to work for no one who would not pay them handsomely. The same would be true of every trade at which there were several workers in the same town.

But in order to make sure that the smiths should not cheat either each other or their customers, there would have to be rules drawn up; and there would have to be officials to enforce those rules and to punish those who broke them, whether they were sellers or buyers. In other words, the trade of the town would have to be organised and regulated. For this purpose in many towns there was formed an association called a *gild-merchant*; and in the charters which towns buy from the king we often find them bargaining for the right to have a *gild-merchant* like that of some other town, as Helston did (pp. 63-4).

Who belonged to the *gild-merchant*? Very often all the townsmen, sometimes only a part of

them. But membership could only be obtained at first by paying an entrance fee.

What was the good of belonging to it? Would it be to the advantage of all the seven or eight smiths to belong to it? Yes! it certainly would. For when a town obtained a gild-merchant, that association would try to regulate all the trade of the town. It would not allow any one except members of it to sell any article (save perhaps foods) in the town without paying heavy tolls and fees. But members of the gild could sell freely. The gild would protect them; it became a sort of friendly society which looked after its members if they were sick, gave funeral benefits when they died, and cared for the widows and children.

But what about the buyers? Was the merchant-gild of any benefit to them? Certainly it was; for by its rules all the smiths, carpenters, masons, weavers, tanners, etc., were prohibited from raising prices or lowering quality; they were compelled to deal fairly. The officials of the gild-merchant fixed prices and qualities for all kinds of goods. They compelled every man to sell openly; they tried to make all the workers at one trade live in the same street so that it would be harder for them to have different prices and qualities. That is why in so many old towns the streets are called after trades; for example, Sadlergate (the saddler's street), Bridlesmith Gate (where the makers of bridles lived), Wheelergate (where the makers of wheels lived), and so on.

Thus the chiefs of the gild-merchant were to the trade of the town what the aldermen were to the

law and order of the town. Both sets of men were drawn from the richest, ablest, and most influential men of the town ; in fact it often happened that the same man would serve in both capacities. And as the aldermen and other town officials formed the body which represented the town when the king's tax-collector or judge came, so the chiefs of the gild-merchant represented the town when traders came from other towns.

They entered into alliances with the gilds of other towns ; agreed to allow the gildsmen of these other towns to buy and sell free of tolls on condition that their own members were similarly favoured when they travelled.

The gild-merchant was thus an association of *all* the craftsmen in the town, whether they were weavers, tanners, smiths, hosiers, dyers, tailors, shoemakers, saddlers, etc.

III. By this time, however, the town would probably contain several thousand inhabitants. It would have several churches, a gild-hall, perhaps a monastery, a market-hall (or *tolsey*, like those which still remain in so many old towns, Chipping Camden for example). A few of the houses—those belonging to the wealthy—would be of stone ; a few might be built partly of stone and partly of wood, but the greater number almost entirely of wood. They were small, rather dark and not very healthy, especially if, as so often was the case, they were crowded together in narrow streets where all the refuse was usually allowed to collect in spite of regulations to the contrary.

But increase of population meant not only a

growth in the number of men working at each trade. It also meant that there would be more trades ; for whereas formerly one or two smiths had done practically all the metal work for the whole community, there would now be cutlers, bridlesmiths, armourers, shoemsmiths and others all working in iron ; and just as the ironworkers were being subdivided into special trades so were the leatherworkers, the wool-workers, and all the rest. There was also a new class of men coming into existence, partly owing to the increase of foreign trade ; I mean the mere dealer in goods. All the craftsmen made the goods, which they sold directly to the person who was going to use them. But the trader was becoming more common ; he bought up goods which he had not even helped to make, and sold them elsewhere, perhaps in a foreign land.

For the present, however, we are concerned with the craftsmen. As the weavers, say, became more and more numerous in a town it would be more and more difficult for the officers of the gild-merchant to supervise their work and their prices. Similarly it would become more and more difficult for the customer to be known personally to the weaver with whom he was dealing. Buying and selling would soon cease to be a friendly transaction. It would also be easier for weavers who did not belong to the gild to gain customers and to avoid paying tolls and fees. Then, too, as the demand for cloth increased, owing to the growth of population, it paid the weavers to keep stocks of cloth in various patterns and qualities. In other words, the opportunities for cheating rapidly increased. What

was to be done? Clearly some other organisation had to be made. The gild-merchant which included every trade could not cope with the growing complexity of productions. "Let us have a gild for each trade," said some wise man, and that was the solution. There grew up craft-gilds. Each craft had its society to regulate the buying and selling of its members' commodities; to fix prices and qualities; to act as a friendly and benefit society to its members.

Thus in every large town during the later part of the thirteenth century and the whole of the fourteenth century powerful craft-gilds arose. There were all the crafts which helped to make clothing; all the branches of wool-workers—shearmen, wool-combers, dyers, fullers, spinners, weavers, tailors, hosiers, clothiers, cappers; and all those engaged in working up leather for shoes, gloves and jerkins—skinners, tanners, glovers. There was a second great group of craftsmen who worked in metals—goldsmiths, coppersmiths, bridlesmiths, armourers, blacksmiths, silversmiths. A third set of crafts was formed of the wood-workers—bowyers, arrow-makers, carpenters, wheel-wrights, etc. Each craft was more or less independent of all the others; but all were to some extent at least under the control of the town authorities—the mayor and aldermen, who would very likely also be the wardens or chief officials of the various gilds.

It was this fact indeed that brought about the downfall of the gild system. It was good for the officials of the gilds to have power to regulate trade in the interests of the town, but it was very easy for

them to get too much power, especially when they also happened to become officials of the town as well as of the guilds. The temptation then was for them to use their powers for their own profit ; and many of them used their positions in order to amass wealth for themselves. In large numbers of cases too the guildsmen tried their hardest to keep all the privileges and advantages of membership confined to as few people as possible. They fixed exorbitant entrance fees, and, by keeping down the number of members and strictly enforcing all the rules against non-members who traded, they were often able to make themselves and the gild very wealthy indeed.

This was happening too at a time when another process was going on, which was bound sooner or later to break the gild system. As trade steadily grew, the craftsmen required more and more helpers. They took apprentices, some of whom no doubt became craftsmen and joined the gild. But many of the apprentices were unable to join the gild : some were too poor to pay the fees ; many were deliberately excluded by the guildsmen who wished to keep the number of members as low as possible. Thus there came into being a new class of workers—the journeymen, the day-labourers, the dependent wage-earners who had to live by selling their labour, who were unable to become independent craftsmen.

Modern writers have expressed this change as the birth of capitalism. It would perhaps be better to call it the beginning of a money-relationship between employer and employed. For before the development of towns the craftsman was his own master ; he received all the profit due to his labour.

But as life became more complex, as the population increased and became concentrated in towns, as it became more and more necessary for a large portion of the population to be engaged altogether in producing commodities for themselves and the other portion of the community to use, so it became necessary for some men to lose the full profit of their labour and to work for hire.

It was partly the discontent of those journeymen and apprentices, especially those of London, that made the Great Revolt of 1381 so sudden and so fierce. It seems to have been the journeymen who organised the rebellion, who laid the plans and gave the signals throughout the eastern counties. They seem to have been banded into a sort of secret society in the southern and eastern counties. They hated the gildsmen and tried to kill the chiefs of the London crafts, because they could see that the richer the gilds became the poorer the journeymen were.

There were, too, in most of the towns large numbers of casual, unskilled workers who never could belong to a gild. They had no definite occupation, and seem to have lived very gross lives; in London especially the Great Revolt shows us the sudden rising of these poorest classes, whose condition it is very difficult for us to picture.

Thus from two points of view the gild system was unsatisfactory. First the gilds usually became very wealthy; they absorbed the greater part of the wealth of the town and so made it impossible for the mayor and his officials to carry out properly the

laws about behaviour, sanitation, paving, housing, weights and measures, etc.

Secondly, their wealth became concentrated in the hands of a few craftsmen of each gild, and the majority of the townspeople were more or less exploited by these few. In fact the poor suffered both ways. The town authorities were often unable to find money to protect or to feed the needy, or even to find them work; yet at the same time the gilds were compelling more and more men to work as journeymen for very poor wages. The gilds became indeed so rich and used so much of their money in religious (Roman Catholic) services, that Henry VIII. caused large portions of their funds to be confiscated. This seriously crippled the influence of the gilds; yet they lasted on in many cases until the end of the seventeenth century. Roughly they may be said to have been most successful in the fourteenth century and after that to have slowly but surely decayed.

### SUMMARY

We have now traced the manorial system to its decay owing to the growth of the wool-trade and the increasing use of money. We have seen also how the towns have passed from a manorial stage through a stage when their industrial life was regulated by a gild-merchant, and then by a system of craft-gilds. We have seen how these too have decayed owing to the growth of population, of trade, and of the use of money. Let us note also that the towns have almost ceased to be concerned with agriculture.



Town-life and country-life have become two quite different things. The town depends on the country for its food-stuffs; the country depends more and more on the town for its boots, its clothes, its money. Note also that many villages still remain almost cut off from other places and maintain themselves without dependence for anything, save perhaps metals, on any other community. But the towns, beginning by being self-contained and self-sufficient communities, which try to keep out all people from other towns, soon begin to seek the trade of other towns and endeavour to make trade agreements with them.

At the same time it must be remembered that the history of no two manors is exactly the same. Nor have any two towns the same history. For example, the gild-merchant did not decay in all towns at the same time. Doubtless in the year 1250 one could have found towns which were still hardly out of the manorial village stage, and not far away a town where the gild-merchant was just founded and another where it had been superseded by craft-gilds and a corporation of mayor, aldermen and councillors.

## PART III

### STATE-REGULATION AND THE MERCANTILE SYSTEM



#### CHAPTER I

##### THE PEOPLE ON THE LAND

ONE of the chief delights of Queen Elizabeth was to go "on progress" through her kingdom, riding from place to place to see how her subjects lived. She found England still a country of forests, although many large stretches of woodland had already been enclosed, cleared and made into pasture-land for sheep. But there were still the great forests of Woodstock and Wychwood, the forest of Arden, Charnwood Forest, Sherwood and Epping and many smaller woodlands. She found many villages which had given up the open-field system and had almost all their land marked out into privately-owned fields by means of hedges and ditches. But she found, also, at least as many villages where the open-field system was still in vogue; where the commonable waste and the common-fields were

still used almost exactly as they had been used for at least five centuries.

For although the manorial system was dead; although the great manorial estates of the monasteries had been broken up and sold by the orders of Henry VIII., although the rich landlords enclosed great expanses of land in order to make sheep-runs; although many of the rich wool-merchants and gildsmen of the towns had bought for themselves country estates so that they might become country gentlemen as well as borough magnates—in spite of all these things, probably the greater part of agricultural England was still cultivated under the open-field system.

How then did the poorer countrymen get their living?

I. THE LANDLESS.—Many of them, as we have seen, had already lost their land; some had never had any land. Clearly these men were compelled either to beg or to work for wages. A large number of them did beg; in fact, England seems to have been swarming with beggars—poor old men and women, infirm and diseased younger people, and thousands of men and women who had never been used to work. Whole families of beggars wandered from village to town and from town to village. Time after time Parliament had passed Statutes of Labourers and other laws to punish beggars, rogues and vagabonds and to make them work. But their numbers seemed to increase and many of them became dangerous robbers.

Evidently Queen Elizabeth and her famous adviser William Cecil were faced with a very

difficult problem. Perhaps they realised, as we do now, that when one system of industry decays and another one begins to develop the result is always poverty, ruin, unemployment and misery for the poorest classes. The manorial system had decayed steadily and in its decay had ruined many families. The distress had been increased by the dissolution of the monasteries, many of which had maintained large numbers of poor people who did very little work for their living. The enclosures too had produced thousands of landless labourers whose children, likewise landless, had gone on multiplying although they lived the poorest of lives often in little hovels built on the scraps of land beside the commons or the forests, or the roadsides.

But whether Queen Elizabeth and William Cecil knew the causes or not, they set to work to find a remedy. They began by deliberately and carefully trying to increase trade; in other words, they aimed at making more work in England. They encouraged corn-growing so that food should be plentiful, and so that more men should be employed on the land than would be the case if the production of wool were fostered. Enclosures therefore became fewer and fewer. They encouraged new trades and compelled English people to wear clothes made in England. For example, on Sundays and saints' days every one had to wear an English cap.

They firmly established, in fact, what was called in later times "The Mercantile System," of which nearly all the chief ideas were already in existence and had been advocated from the days of Richard II. These ideas were roughly :—

1. Traders must carry their goods in English ships; then there will be an increasing need for more English ships and English sailors ; therefore we shall have a strong fleet.
2. We must grow enough corn in England to make us independent of foreign corn.
3. There must be plenty of work for everybody, therefore home manufactures must not be injured by foreign imports.
4. We must not allow gold to go out of the country, therefore exports must be encouraged and imports discouraged.

This was the policy worked out so thoroughly by Cecil and his Queen, and it dominated the minds of most English statesmen until the end of the eighteenth century, when Adam Smith showed that a new policy was needed for the very different England of 1776.

But in Elizabeth's time the policy was so effective that there soon came to be very little excuse for the people who had no work. So further laws were passed, particularly the Statute of Apprentices (1563) and the series of Poor-laws during Elizabeth's reign, by which the wages of journeymen and labourers were to be fixed for each district by the local justices of the peace ; by which the infirm and the aged were to be helped ; by which " the sturdy beggars " and the able-bodied " won't-works," as we should call them to-day, were " to be set on work " and severely punished by whipping or by branding with a hot iron if they would not work. These laws were very

similar to those that had been passed in earlier reigns by Henry VIII. and Edward VI., but they were perhaps wiser, and at any rate they had two great advantages over the earlier poor-laws. (1) They were accompanied by an expansion of trade and by an increase in the amount of work available. (2) They were carried out by a wiser and more efficient government. Perhaps these were the chief reasons why the Elizabethan Poor-laws seem to have been beneficial. At any rate the number of unemployed, and "of idle, loitering persons and valiant beggars" did decrease; and the Elizabethan system of Poor-laws remained in force almost unchanged until 1834.

II. THE LAND-HOLDERS.—But what of those who had land? We need not trouble to inquire about those who were fortunate enough to possess large estates. They were probably growing steadily richer, especially when labour was very cheap owing to the number of those who were unemployed. A very large proportion of the beautiful manor-houses which adorn our English countryside were built in Queen Elizabeth's day and prove clearly that the owners of large estates were prosperous enough. All the larger estates of course employed hired labourers, who would usually live in small cottages on the estate.

The greater part of agricultural England, however, was cultivated either by small farmers with compact farms, or by the villagers who still had their strips in the open fields. Most of these were certainly benefited by the efforts of the Queen and her advisers to increase trade and to encourage corn-growing. But even so there must have been thou-

sands of people who owned quite a small amount of land which produced only just about enough food for themselves and their families. They had their cottages, barns, gardens and ploughlands (with the use of the commonable waste for pasture if their villages were not enclosed). These small farmers would usually produce not only their own food, but would also spin their own wool into yarn and have it made into cloth by a weaver of the neighbouring town. This had been the usual custom for centuries, but already in Elizabeth's day a new system was rapidly growing up. In the country districts more and more of the time of the women and children was being taken up by spinning wool by means of spinning-wheels. Even the menfolk often occupied their evenings and slack days in spinning. They then sold their yarn at the neighbouring market town (which was often many miles away) and so added every year several pounds to the family income.

In fact, partly owing to the increased demand for wool when the wearing of English-made cloth was compulsory, partly owing to the fact that the weavers could use up yarn faster than it could be spun, this home-spinning became quite profitable.

Thus the new system—the domestic system (so called because the industry was carried on in the homes of the people by the whole family)—became popular and very general. At its best it was admirable. Every man who owned a few acres of land could grow his own corn, rear his own sheep and cattle, pigs and poultry, and could alternate his farm-work with spinning and in some cases with weaving as well, if he bought a loom. He was his

own master ; he could work when he liked and as long as he liked. If the harvests were bad, or if diseases killed off his cattle, he could still earn money by his spinning-wheel or his loom, especially if he had an energetic wife and several children. By his own fireside he would sit with his family and all would be working merrily for each other.

Such is the bright side of the picture. No doubt there were many homes where these domestic industries brought happiness. But there can be no doubt that in thousands of homes the domestic system brought misery and degradation. In the first place, many poor people were compelled to eke out a living by doing a little spinning. The wife and children and sometimes the father too had to work for very many hours a day preparing or spinning wool. Often the cottages were small, dirty, insanitary. Sometimes the work was done in lofts or barns. Many men were brutal task-masters to their wives and children just as some of them are nowadays. In some families the passion, or it might be the necessity for earning more money would keep all the members of the family, even the little children, working almost night and day in order to get enough yarn spun to make it worth the father's while to tramp to the town on market-day with a bundle of it on his back to sell for the necessary money. Sometimes indeed a man would employ other children than his own, pauper children who had become chargeable to the parish ; and though, doubtless, many of them were quite as well treated as other children, we can hardly doubt that many of them would be ill-clothed, ill-fed and ill-cared-for.



Even to-day, in the twentieth century, fathers are found cruelly exploiting and ill-treating their own children as match-boys, newspaper-boys or in other such occupations. The conditions of child-labour must have been very much worse in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when almost everybody believed it was good and right that the children of the poorer classes should be put to work at the earliest possible age, which was often as low as seven years.

This domestic system indeed lasted until more than half the eighteenth century had passed. In fact there are some people who work under the domestic system even to-day in the twentieth century: dressmakers, tailors, tailoresses, some carpenters—many such workers do a great part of their work in their own homes.

But during the latter part of the seventeenth and the earlier part of the eighteenth centuries rapid changes began to take place. The system worked well while the country was prosperous, while the government was vigorous and efficient and fostered trade, corn-growing and manufactures. But the government during the reign of Charles II. and James II. was not very vigorous and efficient. Then came a long and very expensive war with France, and to pay for this the people were heavily taxed. As the eighteenth century grew older another period of transition set in. The domestic system was decaying just as the manorial system before it had decayed. The reasons for the decay of the domestic and for the growth of another system will be described in the following pages. But from what

we have seen already we know that the period of transition will bring poverty and distress to the poorest classes. There came a time when many country families became almost entirely dependent on spinning for a living. They not only spun all their own wool, but were supplied with raw wool by the town merchants who paid them just for the spinning. In this way many men who possessed only a small plot of land became dependent for their living on the rich men in the towns. If the merchant's traveller did not bring wool at the right time, or if he did not come at the right time to fetch and pay for the yarn, the spinners often suffered considerable hardships for lack of money. Even if he did come it was perfectly easy for him to cheat the poor spinner. He could bargain with each one separately ; the poorest spinners, those who were most dependent on him for wool, he could refuse to pay at the proper rate ; they would have to take just what he liked to give them for their work.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PEOPLE IN THE TOWNS

AT first, when the countrymen who were spinners as well as farmers took their yarn into the market-town either in a bundle on their own backs or on the back of a horse, they sold it to the wool-merchants of the town, who were often members of a great Company like "the worshipful Company of Merchant Taylors" or the Company of Clothiers. These merchants then sold the wool to weavers who made it into cloth, which was then sold again in large quantities to merchants, to tailors, or in small quantities to customers who wanted just enough for their own clothes, which they would have made by the village tailor in their own homes.

But after a time the business in the towns came to be more closely organised than this. Sometimes agents of the great wool-merchants went round to the villages every few weeks to buy wool. The merchant would then distribute it amongst a number of weavers who in their own homes did work at fixed rates, usually by the piece. They received a certain weight of yarn and were expected to give back to the merchant an equivalent weight of cloth. The same system is still used in the English silk-trade to-day, especially in the Macclesfield district ;

where, although there are many large silk factories, there are also thousands of people who weave all the silk in their own homes, by means of their own looms.

Thus in the towns too there was "a domestic system"; and in the towns it worked well at first. Obviously there were great advantages in each man doing the work in his own house with the aid of his family. If his family were insufficient help, then by the Statute of Apprentices (1563) he could have a certain number of boys whom he was supposed to train to be weavers or whatever the trade was. The apprentices lived usually for seven years with their master's family, were fed and clothed by him and received a small allowance of money. When the apprentices had served their time they became journeymen, and if they had the money or the opportunity they were qualified to become masters if the gild would let them.

But after a time the passion for money-getting became so strong amongst masters as a whole that they preferred to employ a large number of cheap apprentices and very few of the more expensive journeymen. One master in Lancashire had only two journeymen working for him and fifty-five apprentices.

No matter how many apprentices a master had, they were expected to sleep on the premises, and very often little provision was made for them. Readers of *Oliver Twist* will remember that Claypole and little Oliver had to sleep under the counter in the shop. This was of course at a later time, but there seems to be little doubt that thousands of

apprentices in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had to live very rough hard lives, working long hours in very poorly built and poorly ventilated rooms and outhouses, where they also ate and slept.

Perhaps worse still was the common practice of making pauper children into apprentices, without making an attempt to see that the poor lads were properly treated. Pauper apprentices especially were liable to be ill-treated, under-fed, overworked, herded together in sheds, lofts or attics. If they did not behave themselves the justices of the peace might have them flogged ; if they ran away they were almost sure to be caught and brought back ; if they complained of ill-treatment or of anything else, who would listen to them ? They had no fathers or mothers. Nobody was responsible for them.

The apprenticeship system was very good when the masters were good ; but very bad when there were no means of compelling the bad master to teach his apprentices properly and to treat them humanely. In a good master's establishment the boys would be cared for by the master and his wife ; they would often really be like members of the family. So too would the journeymen sometimes. Then in an outhouse, in a cellar or in an attic, the looms would rattle and click away merrily all day long, and everybody would be fairly contented. But in the home of a bad master ugly feelings were only too common. The apprentices were wretched and oppressed ; the journeymen realised that the interests of their master were very different from their own ;

and as time went on and the evils of the apprenticeship system increased there grew up a class of more or less discontented journeymen who could never hope to be masters, but were finding it harder and harder to get work.

Then too, just as in the country districts many spinners often became more and more dependent on the wool merchant's agent, so in the towns more and more of the small masters became dependent on the rich merchant tailors or clothiers. In other words, many masters became as dependent for their living on the rich merchant as the journeymen were on the masters.

For one of the really important things to notice in the industrial history of the centuries between 1300 and 1800 is that a large new class of men has come into existence—the mere trader, the man who makes his living by buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest ; the man who *makes* nothing ; but simply deals in what other people have made ; the man who has *money* and uses it in order to make more money. In the early Middle Ages such men were repressed by law. No man was allowed to buy goods cheaply in order to sell dearly ; no man was allowed to buy up the whole of any commodity in any one market in order to put what price he liked on it. But during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in particular the number of such men had increased very rapidly. This was very largely due to the fact that the means of communication were so poor and so slow ; and as trade between distant towns and distant lands developed, it became increasingly necessary that some men should devote themselves

wholly to the task of buying goods from the producers and conveying them far away to the consumers either in other towns or other countries. Throughout the earlier centuries that kind of work had been carried on in England almost entirely by foreigners—Venetians, Flemings, Pisans or Florentines, and it was a common thing to see wandering from town to town through England a sort of caravan of foreign traders, buying here and selling there. But during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries many Englishmen were also taking up this kind of work. In fact trade could not be carried on without them. Important wealthy companies were formed by such men. They were encouraged and protected by the government; they were sometimes given monopolies (the sole right to make or to sell some particular article; for example, salt, soap, certain wines, pins).

It was this kind of man who in the country districts was making large numbers of spinners dependent on him, and in the towns was making master-weavers, master-dyers, master-tanners, master-hosiers steadily become his hirelings. Just as his agents could oppress the spinners, so the same agents could beat down the prices of the weavers, the dyers, the tailors, the cappers, because there was no combination amongst them now that the guilds were gone. The rich merchant wanted large quantities of the same kind of article, and he wanted to make as large a profit out of the sale as he possibly could.

The industrial history of the eighteenth century in fact is very largely concerned with the rapid increase in the number of "capitalists" who were

making their profits out of the labour of other people. But when we say this we must guard against assuming that it is wrong for a man to ask, or to exact from the workers some payment for his services. Without such a man the workers would be producing only for themselves or for the local market ; they would be unable to sell their surplus productions, and, what is equally important, they would be unable to buy any of the productions of other districts. The trader is not wrong to demand payment for his services and for the risks he runs ; he is wrong only when he enforces excessive payment.



## CHAPTER III

### BANKING AND THE CREDIT SYSTEM

BUT the traders themselves were faced with a very serious difficulty, which increased as their business grew. How were they to find the ready money with which to buy and to maintain huge stocks of commodities? Was it to be that only men who were very rich already should become traders? It is clear that, if a trader has £5000 to start with and he supplies goods to the value of £100 to each of fifty smaller traders, unless the great majority of those traders pay him in ready money he will soon have no cash with which to purchase more goods and continue to develop his business. Many a trader is ruined even nowadays for this reason; he gets all his money "tied up" (as it is called) and his business stagnates for lack of new customers and new stock; for it is very obvious that a large part of trade can never be ready-money trade. Clearly then, before commerce can develop very extensively, traders must have a system of credit and of banking. They must be able to borrow money, and they must also be able to place their surplus cash in safe keeping. A system of credit and a system of banking did indeed grow up almost concurrently. Traders who had cash which they desired to put in a safe place usually sent it to the London offices of the Goldsmiths

Company, who at first simply stored it for a small fee. After a time however it occurred to the Company that this money might be lent to other traders who would pay *interest* for the use of it. In this way the Company made a big profit, and nobody was any the worse so long as the interest was paid, and so long as the Company always had enough cash left to pay any one who might suddenly want his money back. This is the beginning of English banking and credit.

The credit system indeed grew so rapidly and proved itself so very useful, especially to the joint-stock companies which began to be formed in greater numbers during the seventeenth century, that traders began to get a sort of mania for speculation, for founding companies, based largely on credit, in order to make, or try to make huge profits by trade. The result was very often disastrous to the investors, for many of the schemes promoted were what are nowadays called "wild-cat-schemes" (the most notorious was the later South Sea Bubble, 1720), which never had a chance of being successful. But still the *opportunities* of making huge profits were very frequent, especially owing to the development of our colonies and over-seas trade.

But King Charles II. in 1672 seriously injured the security of the Goldsmiths Company. He had already borrowed over £1,300,000 from them at 8 per cent., and he suddenly declared that he would never repay the money but was willing to continue paying the interest. He did not even do this till 1677, and then only paid 6 per cent. A few years later (1683) the king again refused to pay interest and the credit of the Company was severely shaken. Yet

they still continued to do a large banking business. Their receipts actually passed from trader to trader like banknotes, of which they are the forerunners. The traders also who deposited their money with the Company, instead of paying for goods in cash began to give their creditors a note to the officials of the Company asking them to pay the bearer named; this is the origin of the system of payment by cheques.

But statesmen and financiers began to realise that some safer bank was necessary than a mere private company like the Goldsmiths. Besides, this company was often accused of charging excessive interest. Thus in 1694 when King William III. was urgently in need of £1,200,000, the Bank of England was founded. It was a sort of company which, unlike the Goldsmiths, was backed and guaranteed by the English Government. Since that time banking in England has been much more secure, and although the Bank of England has sometimes behaved very unwisely, and although there have been many serious financial crises, yet English banking has always been in the main very wisely and safely conducted.

Now why have we sketched this outline of the rise of banking and a credit system? The answer is that without banking and credit our industries and our commerce could not have developed. The vast changes in industry which we shall trace in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; our wonderful Colonial expansion; the development of our foreign trade; the evolution of the factory system—none of these were possible until traders and manufacturers were able to borrow money and to use credit.

## PART IV

### THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

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WE have already seen how English industries have passed through two periods of transition and how at each period of change great distress was caused. But in the eighteenth century more and greater changes took place in industry and the changes were much more rapid than at any other period in English History. The distress and poverty were, as we should have expected, also more widespread and more serious. Almost every aspect of social and industrial life was changed, both in the country and in the towns. In fact the changes were so rapid and so complete that the period of eighty years from 1760 to 1840 has been called the period of the English Industrial Revolution. It was during those eighty years that the changes were quickest, but they had been developing for many years previously, and it is therefore better to look at the whole of the eighteenth century and the first twenty or thirty years of the nineteenth century as one long period during which we see the new forces gathering, gaining in strength and steadily sweeping over the whole of English industry.

## CHAPTER I

### THE PEOPLE ON THE LAND

#### ENCLOSURES AND POVERTY

IF Queen Anne had ridden through England as Queen Elizabeth did, and if the two queens had compared notes of their impressions, they would probably have found that in the country districts very little change had taken place. The great forests were perhaps a little smaller and less dense, but most of the villages were still "oases of pasture in a wilderness of waste." The open-field system was still the rule, save possibly in Kent and parts of the south-eastern counties. The roads were still mere cart-tracks and bridle-paths almost impassable in winter. In the two hundred years from 1500 to 1700, indeed, English farms and the methods of English farmers had changed very little. Moreover in Queen Anne's day the bulk of English wealth and of English industry was still south of the river Trent. The richest and most thickly populated parts of England were East Anglia, Kent, Surrey, Sussex, the West Midlands, and certain districts in Wilts, Somerset, Devon and Gloucester. In all these parts the wool trade was still the main source of wealth, and, along with farming, provided work for

the great majority of the people. The Northern Counties and the North Midlands were still only sparsely populated, and in comparison with East Anglia and Kent were poor and needy. The great forests and moorlands remained there almost untouched.

The population of all England at that time was about 5,500,000. Luckily we are able to know a good deal about the inhabitants of our countryside at the beginning of the eighteenth century; for Daniel Defoe (better known as the author of *Robinson Crusoe*) wrote several interesting accounts of his travels about England, and his books are full of word-pictures of what he saw. Then too a writer named Gregory King studied about this time the whole question of corn-growing. From the books of these and other writers we are therefore able to gather much valuable information.

We learn that land might be freehold, leasehold or copyhold. It was freehold when it was owned outright; it was leasehold when it was held only for a number of years; it was copyhold when the right to use the land depended on the user possessing a *copy* of the document which had been originally granted by the lord of the manor, entitling a certain person and his heirs to use that land. Now the piece of land—whether freehold, leasehold or copyhold—might be a very large or a very small piece, but it was already better to be a freeholder than a leaseholder and especially than a copyholder. For at the end of the number of years for which the lease had been granted the land returned into the possession of the lord of the manor. Copyholders were even worse off,

for copyhold was really in many respects a relic of feudalism ; the copyholders very often had to render services—like boon-days—and were sometimes subject to fees and fines. Yet it is probable that in the year 1700 the majority of English country-people held their land by copyhold.

Now Gregory King made a calculation of the number of countrypeople in England at this time, and though, doubtless, his figures are only rather careful guesses, yet they are probably not far wrong.

He says that there were—

1. About 16,560 gentry-folk, all of whom had large or fairly large estates, in some cases many thousands of acres.

2. About 160,000 yeomen freeholders, men who were often quite well-to-do, with very large holdings ; but in those days they were not considered “gentlemen.” We should probably call many of them nowadays “gentlemen-farmers.” Oliver Cromwell and Sir Robert Walpole were men of this class ; but there were also many *small* freeholders.

3. About 150,000 leaseholders and larger copyholders.

4. About 400,000 *cottagers*. These were men who held a few acres of land, usually not more than five. Many of the men worked as labourers for farmers or gentry-folk. Others, with their wives and children, earned money by spinning wool.

5. About 364,000 *squatters*, men who neither owned nor held land legally. They had simply settled on the commonable waste, had built a hut or a cottage, cleared a bit of land round about it, fenced it round as a garden, and there kept a few fowls,

perhaps a few pigs and goats which fed on the commons, perhaps even a cow. If the lord of the manor did not turn them off, there they remained, unless indeed the villagers themselves drove them away for using the common to which they had no right. In some parts of England there were large communities of these people; they eked out an existence from their gardens and live-stock, and in addition, like many of the cottagers, the men usually worked as day-labourers for local farmers, while the women and children either did farm-work, or spinning, or became domestic servants.

These "squatters" usually took no part in the routine of the open-field villages, for they held no land. They were there simply as more or less independent and self-supporting workers.

Such is, in brief, a survey of English rural workers about the year 1700. All were fairly prosperous; the harvests for many years were good; there were very few large changes in prices; everything seemed to be going well.

But in reality English agriculture was not prosperous; it was stagnating. Improvements either in the breeding of sheep and cattle or in the raising of crops were impossible while the open-field system lasted. English sheep and cattle were poor in quality and not very healthy; they had been bred chiefly for their wool and their hides, not for their meat. How could a farmer breed better classes of animals unless he had *enclosed* pasture-land, so that he could isolate his best dams from all the other inferior animals which roamed the commonable waste?



Similarly English crops were poor in quality and in quantity. Root-crops (turnips, carrots, etc.) were quite uncommon; and any man would have been thought a fool, if not a knave, to try to grow on his strips in the open-fields any other crops than those which all the villagers were growing. Especially would he have been considered mad if he had tried to experiment with some of the "fancy crops" which were then beginning to be talked about—the new kinds of grasses, or clovers, or wheats. No! every holder of strips had to follow the village routine, whether he liked it or not; he had to waste his time and labour walking from strip to strip; he had to be content if his careless neighbours allowed their strips to be overrun with weeds.

In fact, we who now look at agricultural England as it was from 1700 to 1750 can see that the whole system was stagnant and inefficient. We can see that if once the balance is upset, if any great new need arises, then the old agricultural system will crumble to pieces, and, in crumbling, will cause untold misery because its thousands of dependants, especially the poor, will be uprooted from their holdings and cast adrift.

Great new needs were indeed already arising before 1750.

1. The Whig Government of the year 1689 had been very anxious that England should always be producing far more corn than she would need in ordinary years, so that in case of bad harvests the people should still have plenty of food. In order to induce landholders to grow more and more corn, the Government offered a bounty on exported corn;

in other words, the Government undertook that farmers should receive, in addition to the price of the corn, several shillings for every quarter of wheat they were able to send out of the country.

This was a strong inducement to landowners to get as much land as they could for corn-growing; and also an inducement to try and find methods of making the land they already had produce better and larger crops.

2. Thus there was a steadily increasing tendency for prosperous men to get larger and larger holdings. The same kind of man, too, in the open-field villages became more and more impatient with the open-field system. He wanted land of his own, with fences round it, so that he might do as he liked with it, and cultivate it to the utmost.

Experiments were in fact beginning to be made both in the breeding of animals and in the cultivation of new crops. Tull and Townshend were two famous experimenters, especially in the growing of turnips, and before long there were great reformers of agriculture like Arthur Young (1741-1820) and renowned breeders like Bakewell of Leicestershire and Coke of Holkham (in Norfolk). But all their experiments required large compact farms, not scattered strips of land.

3. Changes were rapidly taking place in other industries. Machines were being invented to make clothing much more quickly and cheaply than before. New industries, like that of making cotton goods, were springing up and making fortunes for enterprising men.

4. Trade was rapidly increasing owing to the development of our colonies.

5. The population was rapidly increasing ; more and more food was being required. Much of the new population was clustering into towns and began to desire more meat for food.

With all these and many more great forces steadily gaining in strength as the eighteenth century rolled on, how could the old agricultural system remain stagnant ?

More corn was needed ; other food crops must also be grown ; meat was wanted, therefore cattle and sheep must be bred, not merely for their hides, but chiefly to sell as food.

How could these things be done ? There was only one way : the open-fields must be enclosed ; men must no longer have their land in scattered strips but in compact farms, carefully fenced round. By enclosure an enormous amount of waste will be saved both in time and in labour ; the land will produce more, it can be better weeded and drained ; and the owner of it can produce on it just whatever is most required.

But how is the land to be enclosed ? Picture once more the ancient manorial village with its three great open-fields cut up into half-acre strips. Think of the scores of men who hold only a few strips. Who is going to convince them—poor, uneducated, powerless—of the wisdom of enclosing ? And who will see that these poor small-holders are fairly treated ? Who will take care that every man shall get just as much land and of as good a quality as he held before ?

As a matter of fact it was usually only the richer and better educated people who saw the necessity for enclosures, and it was almost always these richer people who tried to get the village-lands enclosed. They could do this sometimes simply by agreement amongst the holders of the land. But usually they required an Act of Parliament, and that was what they generally tried to get. A number of the holders of land would draw up a petition to which they would get as many villagers as possible to sign their names. The petition would then be sent to Parliament, who would, if they accepted the petition, appoint a small committee to report upon the matter. If the report was favourable then Parliament granted an Act to sanction the enclosures, and appointed commissioners to see that it was carried out properly. But very often the committees were composed of some of the rich men who desired the enclosure, or of their intimate friends. The commissioners too were sometimes easily bribed and only too liable to overlook the rights of poor men.

Thus, for a time, the village-lands would be in the hands of the commissioners, who were supposed to examine every man's claim to a holding and to treat every holder fairly. All the open-fields were then marked off into compact portions and every man who could prove his right was supposed to receive a plot of land about equal in extent to all the strips he had formerly held.

But what of the poorest copy-holders who had lost their "copy"? What of the men who could not prove their rights to land? What of the

thousands who were unable to convince the commissioners? Many of them lost their holdings, their cottages, their gardens; they were ruined.

Even if they received a fair portion of the land, how were they to pay for fencing and draining it? Few of them had any spare money; many of them had lived a hand-to-mouth existence.

But there was still worse in store for them and for the squatters. Suppose the richer landowners obtained an Act to enclose not only the open-fields but also the commonable waste. What happened to the squatters? In many cases they were simply turned adrift. They never had any legal right either to live upon or to use the commons. They were supposed to be independent, thriftless, slothful, mischievous folk who worked only for themselves. Let them be driven away. Let their shanties be pulled down and their gardens ploughed up.

Sometimes a rather more humane commissioner or landowner would allow them to stay if they could prove they had been there for twenty years. But what was the good of staying if there was no common on which to feed live-stock?

As for the cottagers, how could they make ends meet if there were no commonable waste to provide them with pasture for cows, pigs, sheep or poultry; or provide them with firewood, turves or peat?

The same was true of a vast number of small holders, whether freehold, leasehold or copyhold. Even if they received good and fair farms many of them could not afford to fence or to drain their land or to pay their share of the costs of the Act! And very few small-holders could hold out for long

when they had no commons on which to feed their live-stock.

At least as important was the fact that the new methods of farming required a different kind of man. Many of the men whose lives had been to a great extent regulated for them by the village customs were quite bewildered at first when they were faced by the new conditions and by the fact that they were now compelled to shift for themselves, to depend on their own initiative and ability. Many gave up in despair, sold their land and migrated to the towns.

But all these considerations were of no avail. Enclosures were necessary not only because more food was required but because there could be no scientific farming without them. Thus in the years 1702 to 1750 Parliament granted one hundred and twelve Enclosure Acts. Other enclosures were made during the same period, probably by rich landowners either buying up small holdings, or by inducing the small-holders to assent to enclosure.

But after the year 1750 the movement went on very much more rapidly. From 1750 to 1810 there were 2921 Enclosure Acts. Some idea of the enormous changes effected by these Acts, and some conception of the enormous number of people affected, may be gathered from the fact that in the first thirty-six years of the reign of George III. (1760-1796) there were enclosed by Acts of Parliament over 2,800,000 acres. Yet in 1797 there still remained in England nearly 8,000,000 acres of waste and common fields, the greater part of which was enclosed during the next fifty years.

What were the results of all these rapid changes ? In the first place England gained a much better, productive and more scientific system of farming, and a larger and more varied supply of food-stuffs. Moreover the old system by which a man was dependent on the weather, or under which (in the case of many of the cottagers and "squatters") a man need only work when he felt like working, tended to produce a thriftless, happy-go-lucky class of people with a very low standard of comfort. A large proportion of them was no doubt very much like our modern "unemployables"—men who are quite unused to regular and steady work and are therefore inclined to work as little as possible.

But on the other hand the bad effects were terrible. Thousands of cottagers and squatters with their families were rendered homeless and almost penniless. A few of them found work on the new farms, especially at first while the new fences, ditches and drains were being constructed ; but the great majority simply packed up their few belongings and started to tramp to the towns, especially to the rapidly growing new towns in the North of England where industries were springing up like mushrooms. It is hardly necessary to dwell on the miseries these poor outcasts must have suffered as they trudged the muddy and rutted roads begging their way.

Similarly thousands of men who did receive compact farms were very soon ruined. Some were tempted to sell their farms at once ; these usually went to towns and often started in one of the new industries there. Others remained on, struggling

hard to make ends meet, trying to plod along as small farmers and often failing.

Thus by the year 1800 the English countryside was very different from what it was in 1700. Most of the open-fields had disappeared, and the land was beginning to be covered with small fields surrounded by hedges and ditches. On the land there now was (1) an increasing number of large land-owners with huge estates ; (2) a much larger number of gentleman-farmers with big farms ; (3) a much smaller number of small-holders ; (4) a vast number of *landless* men who worked for wages on other men's farms as labourers, whose wives and children also provided much of the labour required by gentry-folk and farmers.

The enclosure movement in fact, by benefiting the nation as a whole, had also been of great advantage to a large number of rich men, and to the enterprising and go-ahead men who were able to keep pace with the rapidly moving times ; but in the process of change many thousands of the slower, poorer, less enlightened people suffered terribly, and by crowding into districts where cotton-mills, wool-factories and iron-works were springing up, provided very cheap labour for the new industries.



## CHAPTER II

### THE PEOPLE IN THE TOWNS

#### I. MACHINES AND FACTORIES

So far we have seen that the manufacture of clothing, tools and utensils was at first almost entirely carried on in the houses of the people who needed the articles. Afterwards there arose a class of specialists—blacksmiths, leather-workers, weavers, cutlers and the like—who did little but work at their trade, chiefly for their neighbours. We have seen how the area of their trade had been steadily widening ; how from parochial it became municipal, then inter-municipal, then national. We have now arrived at the period when trade has become international. Similarly we have come to the period when production on a large scale has become necessary. But before large-scale production was possible other developments had to occur. Machines had to be invented in order to increase the rate of production and to cheapen the articles produced.

Yet this fact must not make us forget that simple machines have been used from very early times. The spinning-wheel is just as much a machine as a railway-engine. So is a potter's wheel or even a

cutler's grindstone ; and all these have been used for thousands of years. Then too the flour-mill with its water-wheel and its millstones is a machine with a very long history.

But it is a very curious thing that, until the sixteenth century was nearly over, there were very few machines being used other than those we have mentioned ; nearly everything was done by hand. In the year 1589 however a man named Lee invented a machine called a stocking-frame, by which woollen stockings could be made in a much shorter time than before. A large number of his machines was sold, especially in the districts about Nottingham, Derby and Leicester. The machines were either bought or hired by domestic workers, who thus produced stockings not only for their own use but also to sell in the town-markets. These machines were also adapted to knitting woollen caps and gloves, as well as cotton and silk hosiery ; so that during the seventeenth century quite a large industry grew up. It was so large in fact that certain rich men formed in 1657 a large " Company of Framework Knitters " and tried to control the whole industry. They attempted in 1728 to fix the prices at which the Nottingham hosiers should sell their goods ; but the Nottingham men raised a riot and soon afterwards the company broke down (1753).

By this time however other inventions had been made. There were ribbon-machines adapted from Lee's stocking-frames ; and the brothers Lombe had introduced from Italy, and established in a mill at Derby, machines for spinning and weaving silk.

But the most important of these early inventions was Kay's flying-shuttle (1733). Before Kay's time the weaver had to use his shuttle (containing the cross-threads) very much as a darning needle is now used for darning stockings. He had to pass it carefully under and over the threads in his loom. But Kay devised a method by which the shuttle was *jerked* through a space made by alternately raising and lowering alternate threads. The weavers could then work nearly ten times as fast ; they therefore required more yarn, so that the number of spinners rapidly increased and still there was a scarcity of yarn. In 1765 Hargreaves invented a spinning-jenny, a machine by which one spinner could spin as many as ten threads of yarn at a time, whereas formerly by the old spinning-wheel he could produce only one thread at a time. In 1767 Arkwright was able to bring out a water-frame for spinning by water-power. In 1775 and 1779 were produced the inventions of Cartwright and Crompton, by which most of the previous inventions were brought together into one machine. Thus by 1780 the spinners were once more producing yarn more quickly than the weavers could use it.

But the balance was soon re-adjusted, for in 1785 Cartwright made a set of looms which were driven by a water-wheel, so that one weaver could attend to two or three looms instead of one. In 1789 steam-power was used for working looms, and from that date it has always been possible for one weaver to attend quite well to four or even five looms, each one working many times faster than any hand-loom. Later inventions have nearly all been

aimed at making the machines more and more efficient and durable ; for example, Horrocks began to have his looms made chiefly of iron instead of wood.

All the machines mentioned so far were concerned with the actual making of fabrics. The dyeing, the bleaching, and the printing were still all done by the old slow and cumbrous methods. Bleaching was done by hanging out the lengths of calico or flannel in the open air, sometimes for months. But in 1800 a chemical method of bleaching by means of the gas chlorine was invented by Tennant, and the process of making pure white fabrics henceforth required only a few days.

Before 1785-6 the patterns printed on calicoes were all stamped by hand, by means of wooden blocks, on which the pattern was carved, often very crudely ; but in 1785 cylinder printing became the rule ; the pattern was engraved on a roller which was made to revolve at the same speed as that at which the calico was passing through the machine. Thus the printing was done much more accurately and far more quickly.

So far we have dealt chiefly with the inventions for the production of cotton goods. This has now become perhaps the most important of all British industries, yet in the year 1700 there was no such industry. Parliament in fact early in the eighteenth century was still forbidding people to wear cotton clothing, even cotton night-caps ! This was because most Englishmen believed that if cotton goods were commonly used there would be less demand for wool, and therefore not only

would our ancient staple industry be ruined and all the people employed in it, but also the landowners who possessed great flocks of sheep would be impoverished. Therefore even calicoes which were made and printed in India (chiefly at Calicut) were prohibited for a time, even though they were to be used as curtains.

But after a time wiser men began to see that cotton goods would really be required more in warmer countries than in England, and when it was found that there was a splendid market in India for all such goods, then the regulations were relaxed and the industry developed rapidly, especially because of the new machines which were invented for it.

Before long however some of the machines were beginning to be adopted by the manufacturers of woollen goods, especially in Yorkshire, where, after 1773, spinning-jennies were being bought by domestic weavers so that enough yarn could be produced for them by their wives, children and apprentices. In fact some richer men bought a number of spinning-jennies, mules and looms and hired people to work them in one building, even before the power-looms were invented.

For it must be particularly noted here that the invention of power-looms, whether driven by water or by steam, required that the workers, instead of having their machines brought to them, now had to go to the machines, which belonged not to the workers but to the employer in whose mill or factory they were erected. The new inventions made it impossible for the workers to own the

machines, and equally impossible for them to work save in large bodies within the four walls of a factory. The fact that the machines could not be owned by the workers was no doubt a disadvantage ; for the men now became as it were dependent on both the employers and the machines. But the disadvantage must not be over-estimated. Weavers and spinners who did in earlier times own jennies or looms were just as badly treated by employers and traders as were the later factory-workers. On the other hand, the fact that the workers were brought together into factories gave in the long run at least one great advantage—the easy possibility of combining in a trade union ; but we shall read more fully about that later on.

However that may be, it is clear that by 1830 all the textile industries had been “revolutionised.” They were no longer carried on chiefly in the homes of poor people, except in a few out-of-the-way districts and in a few special industries like the making of lace at Nottingham and of silk goods in Cheshire, where there are to this day many home-workers. Instead of the domestic system which prevailed in 1700 the factory system had developed.

Naturally many people resented the changes, as conservative people always resent changes. But there were some men and women who rose in rebellion, attacked the new factories, smashed the machines and hunted the inventors. The people who did this were usually the poor hand-workers whose living was taken away by the wonderful machines. They tried to resist the introduction of machinery, tried hard to compete with the machines when they

were introduced. But they were steadily undersold ; the prices of the articles they made fell rapidly, and it became harder and harder for them to make a living by hand-work. Hence the bread-riots and the machine-smashing. They said that machinery was throwing men out of work ; that was true as far as they were concerned. But machinery was making work for thousands more men, women, and children than those hand-workers whom it impoverished. Workers were required for the iron and coal mines, for the foundries where the machines were made and to work the thousands of machines when they were made. Machinery and factories had indeed come to stay, and the violent despair of a few hundreds of displaced hand-workers could not hinder the vast changes that industry was to undergo.

## II. THE METAL TRADES

But it must not be imagined that the great inventions were confined to the textile trades. The metal trades were also revolutionised. In fact many of the improvements in machinery for spinning and weaving would have been impossible unless the engineering trades had made rapid progress. For example, in 1760, at Roebuck's Carron Iron Works a man named Smeaton invented the blast-furnace, by means of which iron could be smelted much more cheaply and quickly by means of coal, whereas formerly it had to be done by charcoal. Huntsman invented a process for making cast-steel ; Cort was able to get much better kinds of wrought-iron by inventions for rolling and "puddling."

Notice here that the mere use of coal instead of charcoal for smelting purposes caused vast changes in England. Formerly the iron-furnaces and foundries had almost always been in or near forests, especially in Surrey and Sussex. But after Smeaton's invention the industry went to the great coal-fields of South Wales, the Black Country, the Erewash Valley, Northumberland and Durham. Iron rapidly became cheaper and hundreds of new uses were found for it. Not only was it soon wanted for spinning and weaving machines; but also for bridges, and before long even ships began to be built of iron.

More important still was the discovery by James Watt that *steam* could be used to work a pump. In 1774 Matthew Boulton applied Watt's idea to a machine at his Soho (Birmingham) works; for though Watt was a wonderful inventive genius he was not a business man, while Boulton was. Other inventors like Rennie and Murdoch improved on Watt's ideas, and before long there were being used steam-pumps, steam-hammers, steam-saws and all kinds of steam-driven machines in all sorts of industries.

### III. THE PASSION FOR SPEED

As a result of all these developments in the use of machinery the demand for coal and for iron increased enormously. And as that demand increased it became more and more important that the cost of moving such heavy materials should be made smaller. For it must be remembered that in the eighteenth century the roads of England were



unspeakably bad. Many of them were not made roads, but just tracks with great muddy ruts sometimes two feet deep. Even the chief roads were almost impassable in winter ; the slow, lumbering coaches were often stuck fast in the mud, or completely overturned. Horsemen were frequently thrown and their horses lamed. All journeys were not only terribly slow, but often dangerous because of highwaymen ; and the wear-and-tear on horses and vehicles was very costly.

It is not surprising, therefore, that as the new industries developed there grew up also a strong desire to have better roads, and in the years 1760 to 1774 Parliament granted 452 Turnpike Acts, every one of which empowered either certain rich men or certain parish authorities to construct new roads. From that time onwards the system of British roads improved rapidly, especially owing to Telford and even more to Macadam, who in 1815 taught people how to make good hard roads by the method which is still used.

Thus not only were people able to travel much more quickly and safely, but merchandise could be carried more easily and cheaply. Even then, however, transit was not cheap enough, and the idea occurred to the Duke of Bridgewater that if only canals could be constructed like those in Holland he would be able to transport his coal from Worsley to Manchester (a few miles away) by boat instead of in bags on the backs of horses. By the aid of James Brindley—a rough and uneducated but very clever and practical genius—the canal was built and almost immediately the price of coal in Manchester was

halved. This first canal was so successful that it was soon continued to Runcorn.

The example of the Duke of Bridgewater was quickly followed by Wedgwood, the famous owner of potteries and the pioneer of artistic pottery. He helped to promote a scheme for making a great canal, called the Grand Trunk Canal, from Runcorn through Cheshire and Staffordshire—the salt and pottery districts—to join the river Trent. By this means the cost of carrying clay, coal and lime to the potteries, and of transporting the pots from the potteries was reduced from 50s. per ton to 13s. 4d. per ton.

Naturally these results made manufacturers and speculators believe that canals were going to enable them to make huge profits, and almost every one who had money to invest tried to get shares in the numerous canal companies which were being formed. There was, in fact, a “canal mania”; in four years (1790–94) Parliament passed 81 Canal Acts, and before the year 1800 England was well supplied with canals.

But the easier and cheaper means of transport only gave opportunities for still greater industrial developments; and just as scores of inventions had been made to increase the rate of *production* so now there was a growing desire to increase the rate of *distribution*. Roads and canals were not fast enough. Couldn't steam-power be applied to moving wagons and boats? This was a question that many men were trying to solve during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century. In 1803 a little steam-tug called the *Charlotte Dundas* was puffing on the Forth and Clyde Canal.

In 1807 an American inventor placed a steamboat on the river Hudson, and ran regularly between New York and Albany. In 1820 steamers began running between Dublin and Holyhead, and by 1835 there was a steamship service between Suez and Bombay. From that time the increase in the number, size and speed of steamships has been enormous, and although sailing-ships are still very common and very useful the great bulk of the world's trade is now done in great swift steamships, built largely of steel.

But while some inventors were trying to make boats go by steam others were striving to apply steam-power to wagons. The problem was first solved with real success by George Stephenson, who in 1823 was enabled to show his new locomotive engine running on the Stockton and Darlington Railway. Soon came the famous Liverpool to Manchester Railway, and the success of it was so great that before long there was a "railway mania" far madder than the canal mania had been forty years earlier. Almost every one wanted to invest money in the new railways, which soon covered Britain with a network of lines far more intricate than that of the canals. Some of the canals indeed were abandoned, or were even bought by railway companies so that they should not be used to carry goods. Yet the constructors of railways owed much to the constructors of canals; for Brindley and his successors had already found how to construct long tunnels and great embankments, and without that knowledge railways could not have been successful.

Their success however was astonishing. Not only did a railway train carry passengers and goods much more quickly than either coaches, wagons or canal-boats, but it carried more of them ; and though the rates for carrying goods were higher by rail than by canal, yet the extra speed induced the great majority of people to send all their materials by rail. For this reason the canals as a whole lost much of their prosperity, and it is only in recent years that many traders have begun to realise that it would probably be well worth their while to send all such things as coal, ore, stone, and building materials by canal, since rapidity of distribution is less important for such things. Yet it cannot be said that the passion for speed is less than it was. We are now living in an age when every effort is being made to increase the rate at which we may transport ourselves and our commodities from place to place. The use of motor-cars and motor-vans, the application of electricity to all kinds of locomotives, are all with the object of quickening transit, and one cannot tell what inventions may yet be successful.

#### IV. THE FACTORY SYSTEM

But, while the passion for speed was developing, there was also growing a desire to produce commodities in greater and greater quantities, because it is usually cheaper to make a huge quantity than a small one. We have already seen how the invention of machinery and the application of steam-power to those machines compelled the owner of the

machines to bring his workpeople together into factories, mills or foundries. The owner of every steam cotton-mill for example desired to make his engines do as much work as possible ; he therefore kept adding to the number of his looms ; he tried to run his engines as long as possible and as fast as possible. In this way factories became larger and larger ; more and more workpeople were wanted, and as there were no customs, rules or laws by which the new factories could be conducted it was at that time thought advisable by most employers to work their " hands " as long and as hard as possible, just as they did with their machines.

The demand for labour therefore increased very rapidly, and, luckily for the factory-owners but very unluckily for the " hands," there were thousands of people at the beginning of the nineteenth century only too anxious to get work at any price. The Enclosure Movement had provided the new manufacturers with a huge supply of cheap labour—men, women and children, who had no traditions, no customs, no leaders to guide them or to warn them, and no means of earning a living unless they tramped to the factories and sold their labour as well as they could.

The results to English industry and commerce were splendid ; Britain became the workshop of the world ; we were able to produce goods so cheaply and in such vast quantities, and we had such a long start over other nations because of the wonderful mechanical inventions of a few Englishmen like Kay, Crompton, Cort, Horrocks, Wedgwood, Watt and Stephenson that we have long been the greatest

and richest commercial and industrial community in the world.

The results to most English manufacturers and traders were equally splendid ; most of them became very rich, and their descendants to-day form a large proportion of the wealthiest and most influential families in England. Many of these pioneer manufacturers bought large country estates and became rich land-owners as well as factory-owners. Thus they produced a rich middle-class composed chiefly of keen, eager business-men full of the passion for "getting on." These were the men for whom and largely by whom the great Reform Act of 1832 was gained ; for having secured financial and industrial power they now desired political power so that Parliament might pass laws for the benefit of trade. The result was soon seen in the agitation for Free Trade ; for the abolition of all restrictions like tariffs and taxes on goods exported or imported. For about thirty years indeed these people were the chief industrial and political influence in England.

But the results to the workpeople were very terrible. In the new factories themselves very little care was taken to protect the workers from the machinery. Many of the buildings were unsuitable, unhealthy, dangerous. The hours of labour were often as long as sixteen per day, and the wages, though higher than those of farm-hands, were far too low. Thus the conditions of labour for men were thoroughly bad. But thousands of women were also employed, sometimes half-naked in coal-mines ; and even in factories there was little care taken to keep them womanly and clean-hearted. As

for the thousands of young children who worked in the new mines and factories, the effect on them can well be imagined. Hundreds of them were pauper children from the workhouses. In some cases they were compelled to sleep in the factories. The machines ran all day and all night, and one set of children worked while another set slept in the long rows of beds. From the age of seven and upwards these children worked long hours, often only for their board and lodging. They received little or no care, no education. The death-rate amongst them was probably very high, and even those who lived usually grew up to be stunted, dwarfed and brutalised.

Perhaps an even greater evil, however, grew up outside the factories and mines. Most of the great mills, foundries and collieries were started in districts that had formerly been almost purely agricultural. The green fields and the brown ploughlands gave place to great refuse heaps. The quaint old, sleepy villages with their few houses could not possibly accommodate the hundreds of families whose labour was now required. Where could they live? The old houses already existing were soon shockingly overcrowded. New houses were built as rapidly and as cheaply as possible. Rows on rows of little cottages grew up in streets not planned or well-ordered but just higgledy-piggledy. Proper drainage was hardly thought of; cleanliness and sanitation were held of very small account. The smoke and grime from the chimneys and furnaces belched over old houses and new, and the result is seen to-day in the awful back streets and tortuous slums of our

great industrial towns where millions of people live narrow gloomy lives cut off more or less completely from sunlight and fresh air, and horribly overcrowded.

Then too we have to remember that the Enclosure Movement had also impoverished thousands of peasant families, many of whom were being kept by the parish as paupers. But even the poor-law was inefficient and so applied as to make the evils greater. Wages were so low—there was very little work in the countryside, and so very many men to do it—and the price of corn was so high (partly owing to the war, partly to bad harvests and partly to the rapidly increasing population) that certain kind gentlemen at Speenhamland in Berkshire thought it would be well to supplement the wages of the poor out of the rates; and the example of these justices was soon imitated elsewhere! In other words, when a man did not earn enough to keep his family his wages were made up to the required amount by the parish. It is easy to see that large numbers of men would therefore be tempted to work less; they would get their wage made up no matter how little they worked. On the other hand, employers began to worry less about the sufferings of their labourers. Employers might just as well pay through the rates as by means of wages.

How was it that such dreadful evils were allowed to grow up? Were there no humane men and women in those days? Were there no generous, kind-hearted employers? Were there no thinkers and reformers to point out what evils were being produced? Of course there were. This was the age of John Howard and, after him, of Elizabeth Fry,



who wore out their lives in trying to improve prisons, which at that time were dens of filth, disease and vice. This was the age (1784) of Dr. Percival of Manchester who stirred up public opinion in his district against the ill-treatment of child-workers. It was the age of Robert Owen (1771-1858), the great and noble if rather misguided and unwise pioneer of Co-operation and of Socialism.

In fact there were many men who were keenly alive to the evils ; they formed societies for social reform, they wrote books, they made speeches. But they preached to an age that in its social and industrial ideals was brutal, thoughtless and selfish. Amusements were cruel and degrading ; they were cock fighting, pugilism, bull baiting. Punishments were brutal and degrading ; men were publicly hung for petty thefts ; women were publicly whipped for small crimes. The home-life of the people was as bad ; women and children had always been expected to work ; they must do so under the new conditions. Men drank huge quantities of beer ; a kick or a fierce blow was the common retort to wife or child. Dirt was the rule, cleanliness the exception. It was the age of the press-gang, by which thousands of men were stolen by the king's officers to fight in the wars against Napoleon.

Strangely enough it was also the age of great-hearted men like the poets Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge and Keats, all of whom saw quite clearly the horrors of their age and expressed their ideals of beauty, of joy, of hope in magical poetry. But they were like voices crying in the wilderness, and very few people of their day seem to have repented

or tried to prevent the awful things that were being done in the name of progress.

Think of such a nation suddenly faced with the vast changes caused by the introduction of machinery. Think of the thousands of new opportunities for becoming rich. On all sides one could see men who were poor one year, becoming well-to-do the next year and steadily becoming wealthy. One could easily forget the many failures when there were so many successes. The passion for "getting-on" seems to have been the ruling motive of the age. In fact the great majority of the thinkers of the time were quite content to believe that all men were selfish and, if left entirely alone, would always do what was best for themselves and that this would be best for the nation as a whole. In 1776 a very clever and thoughtful man named Adam Smith published a big book called *The Wealth of Nations*, in which he argued that the old policy of taxing imports and giving bounties on exports was not only wicked but foolish; that it would be far better for the nation to give up trying to *regulate* its trade and to allow it a natural freedom. He convinced nearly all the chief men of his time, and soon laws began to be passed against any kind of restraint of trade. Nothing was to be allowed to interfere with the freedom of every man, rich or poor, to bargain, to buy and sell, to make, to grow, or to produce. Every man was to be let-alone. The French words for let-alone are *laissez-faire*, therefore this "let-alone policy" is usually called the policy of *laissez-faire*.

The teachings of these men were the greatest

obstacle to the efforts of men like Howard, Percival and Owen ; for the rulers of the country almost all believed in *laissez-faire*. The Government must not do or allow anything that looked like restraint of trade. Yet curiously enough the great majority of these rulers and thinkers were warm-hearted, humane and generous. They gave much money to try and alleviate the distress and misery they saw around them ; they bewailed the evils just as sincerely and as sympathetically as any one, but they said it had to be so and on no account must the State interfere, for that would be contrary to all the spirit and the principles of the time.

Yet even in spite of the spirit and principles of the time something had to be done. Parliament was faced with evils so great that in 1802 it had to become false to its principles by passing the first Factory Act. This was an Act limiting the hours of labour of child-apprentices to twelve per day. Such children must not be allowed to work at night ; they must be taught reading, writing and arithmetic, and be given a suit of clothing every year. Factories must be whitewashed every year and always be properly ventilated. The justices of the peace were to appoint two inspectors in each district (one must be a clergyman), and fines were to be inflicted on all employers who broke the rules.

But the Act was of very little practical use, largely because it could not be enforced. Many of the justices did not attempt to enforce it ; those who did were met by the difficulty that the Act said nothing about children who were *not* apprenticed ;

therefore nothing could be done to those employers who still cruelly exploited such children.

However it was something to get Parliament setting before the nation an ideal, even though not a very high one, and giving some guidance as to the principles on which factories ought to be run. This Act of 1802, in fact, was the beginning of a long series, each becoming more definite, more precise, more thorough and more effective. From time to time during the century following this first Act, Parliament has steadily reduced the hours of labour of workers in factories, mines and workshops; thus miners may now work only eight hours per day, and are guaranteed a living wage. It has compelled factory-owners to have their factories and mines clean and well ventilated, their machines carefully protected so that the workpeople shall not be injured, save by sheer carelessness. It has fixed the conditions under which dangerous trades (like match-making, glass-grinding, lead-glazing, etc.) shall be carried on. It has appointed a Wages Board to deal with "sweated" industries, in which the workers have hitherto received too small a wage to enable them to live decently and healthily. It has passed the Workmen's Compensation Act, which compels an employer to compensate a worker (or his relations) who receives an injury while pursuing his work.

In all these and in many other ways factory-life has been improved and regulated in the interests of the workers. But this legislation has also acted in the interests of the employers: it has given them higher ideals; it has made them more humane

and at the same time has hardly reduced at all their rate of profit. For the workers who are well-paid, well-cared-for and humanely treated usually work better and more productively.

The State interfered too with regard to the Poor Law, which had been only slightly amended since the days of Queen Elizabeth. The plan followed by the Speenhamland justices had pauperised and demoralised thousands of poor people, and the evils of pauperism—the condition of the workhouses, the sloth of the paupers, the cost of supplementary wages—had grown to such enormous proportions that severe measures were adopted. Schemes for State-aided emigration to Canada had been tried ever since 1826, and had assisted many of the poor; but something much more effective was required. The new Poor Law of 1834 enacted that no relief should be given to those who were able to work, save in workhouses, where they must do work of a more or less unpleasant kind. In fact the assistance to be given to the able-bodied poor was to be made difficult to get, and not very attractive or pleasant when it was obtained.

The new law was extraordinarily successful in some ways, especially from the point of view of the rich people; the rates in a few years were only a quarter of what they had been and the percentage of paupers decreased rapidly. The poor were soon convinced that it was hardly worth while to appeal to the parish; the Poor Law was decidedly deterrent, and has lasted, with a few modifications, until the present time (1912). But we are finding out that the Poor Law of 1834 is also incomplete,

often unfair to the poor who are able and willing to work but cannot get work, and very often cruel to children or to the sick and aged. Changes are again required, and before long no doubt there will be a new Poor Law—wiser, more humane and more effective than any which has preceded it.

The desire for State-regulation has also developed in another way not less valuable. The evils of overcrowding in slum-houses, the prevalence of insanitary dwellings and badly-drained towns soon forced the best people to seek the influence of Parliament in this direction also. The result has been a series of Housing Acts which have culminated in the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1910, by the authority of which many filthy and unhealthy slums will soon be demolished.

The same desire for health, order and intelligence produced the great Education Act of 1870, by which hundreds of schools have been built at the public cost for the workers' children. These are now almost all controlled and managed by the State; so that over 6,000,000 children are not only taught but, if needy, are fed, and if ill are attended to by the State-doctor. State-regulation has in fact now gone so far that by the Insurance Act of 1911 every worker is insured by the State against sickness or unemployment.

Could there be a greater contrast than that between the year 1811 and the year 1911? In the former year almost every one believed in individual liberty and *laissez-faire*, and the result was a reckless, unrestricted competition in which profit and self-interest were the main considerations,

and brutality, callousness and ignorance the prevailing social features.

In the year 1911 there are still many very serious social and industrial evils, but with almost every one of them the State has tried and is honestly trying to deal. We live in an age which believes in State-regulation if it is of the right kind; and though no doubt State-regulation may produce evils of its own, those evils can hardly be as bad as those produced by a policy of non-interference. The age is one of humane endeavour and of social sympathy. Our efforts to prevent or to cure the evils which still cripple the lives of so many workers are still very imperfect and perhaps not always wise, but at any rate we are as a nation earnestly trying to mend matters; we are all acutely aware of the horrors of unemployment, disease, vice and poverty. Our age is conscious of its ailments; the age of Robert Owen was not. Our consciousness indeed is due to a long line of brave and noble pioneers like Robert Owen. They gave their enthusiasms, their energies, their lives to the great fight for health, order and education. Owen more than any other man is the founder of the vast organisation called the Co-operative Movement, which has dozens of factories, thousands of shops and millions of members who have all combined to make, to sell and to buy amongst themselves all sorts of articles which have been produced by honest labour honestly paid and humanely treated. We think too with admiration of F. Denison Maurice and Charles Kingsley, who wore out their health for the Christian Socialist Movement and in the

campaign to get more education for working-men. We remember Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin, whose mighty pens goaded the thinkers and politicians of their age into action. Then too we recall those men of very different types, John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx : the former careful, thoughtful and scientific ; the latter passionate, eager and unscientific—yet both preaching that the State must interfere more effectively with industry. There are hundreds more—artists and poets like William Morris, statesmen like Lord Shaftesbury ; and thousands of warm-hearted enthusiasts who have left hardly a trace in history save the rapidly-growing sense of brotherhood and the desire for self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control, which should be the motto for our nation as well as for each individual of that nation.



## CHAPTER III

### TRADE COMBINATIONS

ONE of the basic principles of the doctrine of *laissez-faire* was the theory that in trade and industry all men were equal in bargaining power. In other words, it was believed that a rich factory-owner who wanted a labourer had no advantage over the poor labourer who wanted to sell his labour ; and that the bargain ultimately struck between them was perfectly free and fair on both sides. Acting on this assumption the statesmen of the latter part of the eighteenth century thought they would be wise and just if they tried to prevent any sort of influence giving either the master or the labourer the slightest advantage in the bargaining ; for such influences would be in restraint of trade and individual liberty, and therefore must be repressed.

To begin with, it is clear that the assumption of these wise and just men was wrong. A poor man with a wife and children depending upon him is in a very different position from the rich man to whom he offers his labour. The rich man will not starve for months if he gets no labourers ; the poor man must sell his labour at once or he cannot get food for himself and those dependent upon him. Then, too, the poor man has nothing to sell except his labour ;

and there are always thousands of other poor men equally anxious to sell their labour ; yet in a given district there may be only one or two men who desire to purchase labour. Clearly, then, the bargain is not a fair one, since the employer has a very great advantage. Nor is the bargain a free one in these circumstances, for the worker is compelled by sheer necessity to sell his labour at any price which the employer chooses to give. Of course the poor man may go somewhere else for work ; but that is what men who love their friends and the place of their birth seldom wish to do. Even if he does go, his position will be very little altered.

Some of the workers themselves had long ago begun to realise that they were in the weaker position when bargaining with employers. They began, particularly in the tailoring trade, to form clubs or unions very much like some of the mediæval craft-gilds of which we have already traced the growth and decay. But the aims of the unionists of the eighteenth century were no longer to regulate the quality of the work done, but almost entirely to secure better wages or better conditions of labour. They formed in fact what are now known as Trade Unions, which are defined as "continuous associations of wage-earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their employment." As early as 1720 the journeymen tailors of London had a union which tried to compel the master-tailors to give better wages ; the masters got Parliament to pass an Act against these men. All through the eighteenth century, indeed, bodies of employers were obtaining Acts of Parliament against combi-

nations of workpeople. These combinations were held to be illegal, not only because they were in restraint of trade, but also because they were an attempt to fix other wages and conditions of labour than those fixed for each district by the justices of the peace. For it must be remembered that the laws of Queen Elizabeth were still in force ; therefore to attempt to fix wages by any other than the legal methods was something like rebellion against the laws.

But as the eighteenth century wore on, as the changes in industry became more rapid and more complete, as the various industries began to settle down in well-defined districts ; as the factory-system developed, the workers in any one industry were brought more closely into touch with each other. Under the domestic system of industry continuous combinations of workers had been almost impossible, save occasionally in the clothing trade in London and the West of England ; the workers were all too scattered. But in a large factory the hundreds of "hands" soon began to realise a community of interests ; they soon began to develop a common sympathy, and to have a common policy ; to subscribe to a sick-benefit or burial club of their own ; to combine against their employers. The movement became so common indeed that in 1799 Parliament passed an Act saying very definitely that *all* such combinations were illegal. This Act was strengthened by another in 1800. For most English statesmen were terrified by the awful things that had been happening in France during the French Revolution, and feared that any meeting or society

of poor people in England was a revolutionary body formed to murder all aristocrats and to make England a Republic.

Just at the time, therefore, when the workers were most urgently in need of assistance, owing to the enclosures, to the rapid changes in industry, to the high prices of food, to the false assumption of the statesmen; just when the workers were finding out by very bitter experience that collective bargaining by means of a union was the only means they had of making anything like a fair deal with employers—just then all the powers and penalties of the law were brought against them.

What were the workers to do? Were they to give up all idea of forming unions and each man face employers for himself alone? Were they to give up bargaining as a body (collective bargaining) and be content to compete with each other for work? They knew that their position would be even more hopeless and unfair if they did, so they decided to continue their unions, if possible in secret. They continued to organise strikes which sometimes became furious riots. Thus for the next twenty-four years they were the object of almost ceaseless persecution and prosecution. Luckily there was one man—Francis Place, a London tailor—who was willing to devote all his extraordinary abilities and tact to the task of getting the law against combinations altered. In the *Life of Francis Place*, by Mr. Graham Wallas, you will find a most interesting account of how this clever tailor persuaded, almost tricked Parliament into repealing the Combination Laws in 1824; and, though in the following year

(1825) Parliament repented and re-enacted parts of the old laws, yet from this time forward working men and women have had the legal right to bargain collectively and to strike if they wished.

Trade unions have, of course, had to face many difficulties since 1825. The law has never been very favourable to them, but they have steadily become stronger, wiser and more effective. In their early days almost their sole weapon was the strike, and very often strikes were ineffective because a very large proportion of the workers did not and could not be persuaded to join a trade union. Recognising this difficulty, Robert Owen and his disciples tried to persuade working-men to form not merely *local* unions but great national organisations covering the whole of each of the chief industries. The most effective result of this idea was the formation in 1850 of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, which was formed of many small societies. Since that time the idea of amalgamating the unions in allied industries—one great society for all metal-workers, another for all miners, another for all textile workers, a fourth for all workers engaged in transport—has slowly but steadily developed. And though there are still hundreds of small independent trade unions there are also great organisations like the General Federation of Trade Unions and the Trade Union Congress, as well as the Miners' Federation and amalgamated unions of weavers, spinners and most of the other trades. Thus a strike nowadays is a much more effective, though a much more terrible weapon. These great societies with their enormous membership have huge funds

which they may pay to strikers or to sick members in order to provide them with food and shelter while they are not working. Thus a national strike of miners is, as we have recently proved, a very terrible thing: in a few weeks every train, every factory and foundry, every industry is brought to a stand-still for want of coal. In fact some writers believe that the workers are really the masters of the industrial world whenever their unions are strong enough in point of numbers to control a great majority of the workers in any particular industry.

But since about 1860 the workers have found another weapon, which, although not so showy or dramatic, has gained for them many triumphs and advantages. Acting on the advice of John Stuart Mill, a brave and clever agitator named George Jacob Holyoake urged working-men to elect members of their own ranks as Members of Parliament. It was a long time before the idea gained many effective supporters, but in 1874 thirteen Labour candidates went to the poll at the General Election, and two, Messrs. Alexander Macdonald and Thomas Burt, were elected. Since that time more and more "Labour men" have been elected and have gradually formed in Parliament a strong Labour Party. The influence of this body of working-men has done much to enlighten public opinion as to the disadvantages and disabilities of the working-classes; and there can be no doubt that much of the increasing desire of nearly all Englishmen to heal and to prevent social disease is due to the knowledge which these representatives of labour have been able to diffuse.

Thus by the year 1912 there were in Britain nearly 1200 trade unions, all of which regulate the wages and the hours of labour of their members! They all provide their members with out-of-work pay, and all practise more or less thoroughly collective bargaining. All of them resort as a last expedient to the strike in order to enforce their demands. Naturally such organisations are in many ways very imperfect: they are composed of men who as a rule are very insufficiently educated; their officials too often have very little more education than the average member. But there can be no doubt that, as the level of national education rises, the unions will choose abler, shrewder and wiser leaders who will infuse into their members a finer, broader and nobler spirit.

But just as there are now over twelve hundred trade unions, so there are also nearly twelve hundred combinations of employers. There is for example a very powerful and wealthy association known as "the Steel Combine," in which the majority of the owners of iron and steel works have joined together in order to regulate the prices of metal-goods and in order to protect each other, especially by avoiding competition. There is the great Cotton Spinners' Association, the Shipping Federation and the Flour-Millers' Association, as well as combines representing the chief manufacturers of soap, wall-paper, leather-goods, and nearly all the other industries. Even the great railway companies have made agreements with each other. Employers in fact have adopted much more thoroughly than the workers the policy of collective action.

Yet the employers have had to face no persecution from the law. The old Combination Laws were, it is true, passed to prevent any kind of interference with trade and industry, and in the early years of the nineteenth century several employers were prosecuted, usually by trade unionists, for making agreements with each other to regulate prices and wages. But both the statesmen and the lawyers usually looked upon combinations of employers favourably and very few were convicted. Thus the successful manufacturer who had made one factory pay and had then built a second or a third elsewhere soon began to associate himself with other manufacturers of the same commodities. In this way all the members of the combine might join to "lock-out" all their workers if the latter wanted too high wages or some other improvement of their lot. The "lock-out" was the masters' reply to the workers' "strike."

The twentieth century indeed sees the world of labour in a very serious state of unrest. On the one hand are the unions, steadily growing stronger, steadily becoming more enlightened and steadily raising their demands for a larger share in the profit of industry. On the other hand are the employers, becoming more and more closely associated in "combines," which may before long become "trusts" like those of America, with huge supplies of money which are to be devoted to crushing all opposition to their desire for big profits. Fortunately the antagonism between the two sets of forces is more apparent than real, and as each side becomes more fully aware of the needs of the other



side, as each side becomes more broadly and sanely educated, there will be a fairer and wiser adjustment of their relations. In fact the chief characteristic of the industrial world now is the faith that is placed in "Conciliation Boards," which are committees formed of equal numbers of masters and workers. The antagonism between the two, although it appears on paper to be increasing, is in fact slowly but surely diminishing. The amount of co-operation between employers and employed is increasing ; the old barriers between rich and poor are slowly, though perhaps too slowly, breaking down, and although doubtless there are still many quarrels to be fought out and many strikes and lock-outs to take place yet, the growth of social sympathy and of brotherhood is assured.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE GROWTH OF THE EMPIRE

So far we have been dealing almost entirely with the way in which industries have developed in England. But those industries would certainly not have developed as much and as fast as they did between the years 1760 and 1840 if it had not been that England was rapidly acquiring colonies and dependencies in all parts of the world. These colonies provide us with huge quantities of raw material like cotton, wool, timber, skins and ores. They also offer splendid markets in which we may sell our manufactured goods. In fact it is hardly too much to say that the commercial and industrial supremacy of England is chiefly a result of her colonies. We must therefore try to find out how the growth of our vast empire has influenced our home industries and thus very vitally affected the lives of English workpeople.

We are most of us familiar with the stories of Drake, Raleigh, Hawkins and Frobisher. But perhaps few of us realise that these daring men did something much more wonderful and lasting than sail "the Spanish Main" or "sing the King of Spain's beard." They were really the pioneers of colonisation and of our vast commerce. Raleigh

himself was one of the first to set the example by trying to found settlements, which failed pitifully, in Virginia. But during the seventeenth century English adventurers or traders were planting settlements or trading stations not only in North America but also in Africa and in India. Trading companies were formed to bring to England the products of Virginia. The Royal African Company was established to trade with Africa, and the famous East India Company was promoted in order to open up markets in India. All these companies were associations of men who contributed what money they could to a common fund which was to be used in trade with the distant lands. The profits were to be divided in proportion to the amount each man had contributed. In their small sailing ships of only a few hundred tons burden the daring traders risked their lives, in order to find the best trading-places.

As the companies became more firmly and regularly established small settlements of traders remained behind in the foreign lands. They built themselves little forts and engaged in trade with the natives, whether they were Hindus who made fine silks or excellent calico, or negroes who could supply ivory and skins, or Red Indians who could sell furs or tobacco. In payment for these commodities they gave not money but whatever they found by experience the natives prized most—in India cotton goods; in Africa beads and highly-coloured cloths and ornaments; in America guns, whisky, glass and cloth. Scores of these traders lost their lives in the early settlements. Sometimes

the natives attacked and captured the forts and killed the inhabitants. More often the settlements were attacked by other Europeans—by the French in North America, by the Dutch and the Portuguese in India and Africa. Unfortunately too, even the attacks of the natives were not seldom due to the fact that other European traders had treated them unfairly or cruelly, and the English traders therefore, who, on the whole, were genuinely fair and humane, had often to suffer for the misdeeds of Frenchmen or Dutchmen.

The three nations in fact soon began to compete furiously for the control of these foreign markets. At first England and Holland, being Protestant countries, were allies against Roman Catholic France which was trying hard to crush Protestantism completely. England in fact chose a Dutchman, William III., to be her king, and English armies led by famous English generals like Marlborough helped Holland to withstand the attacks of France. But before the war was over and the Treaty of Utrecht was signed in 1713, Holland found herself almost ruined by the cost of the wars; she could no longer produce so many trading ships; she was no longer a dangerous rival of England in the struggle for colonies, and half a century later England was left by the Treaty of Paris supreme in North America and India. This we owe very largely to the elder William Pitt and to the great soldiers Wolfe and Clive.

Then on the revolt of our American Colonies (1775-83), very largely for commercial and industrial reasons, the French sided with the Americans

and we were once more at war with them. Ten years later the war with Revolutionary France began, which soon became the mighty Napoleonic Conflict (1793-1815). This was really very much to England's commercial advantage; for Napoleon's gigantic schemes for conquering every European state soon made almost the whole of Western Europe unable to think of anything but war. Commerce and industry were far from their minds. Thus while Wellington and Nelson were fighting to the death with the huge French armies and fleets, partly for fear England should be invaded, but much more for fear she should be left the sole opponent of France—at this very time English inventors, English manufacturers, and English workpeople were piling up wealth; were building factories, foundries, ships; were exporting rich cargoes of cotton, iron and steel goods to our colonies and dependencies in Asia, Africa and America. They were piling up wealth that not only helped to pay for the costly war, but also enabled us to develop our colonies and our home industries, to take advantage of our inventions while other nations were preoccupied with fighting. So that when Nelson defeated the French Fleet at Trafalgar he was really removing the one serious menace to England's commercial prosperity.

By the year 1815, which saw Napoleon's irrevocable defeat at Waterloo, England had in fact gained an enormous start over other nations.

We had—1. Canada, with its rich wheat and fruit grounds, its vast forests and mineral wealth, its fisheries and those of Newfoundland. 2. India,

where Warren Hastings had made the East India Company much more powerful than before, and had given us safe and ready markets for our rapidly increasing output of cotton goods, which were paid for by raw cotton, spices, tea, silks and ornamental goods. 3. Cape Colony, taken from the Dutch, with its gold, its diamonds, its sheep, cattle and ostriches. 4. Ceylon with its tea gardens. 5. Australia, at first used only as a convict settlement, but destined ere long to gain great economic importance as a producer of wool and of gold. (New Zealand was annexed only in 1840.) 6. Many smaller lands, like British Guiana and Mauritius, and especially the profitable West Indies, which supplied so much sugar, spices, valuable timbers and fruit.

After 1815 England was mistress of the seas and could freely and safely develop her vast possessions. But the war was hardly over before she had to face the fierce competition in her foreign and colonial markets of first France, then Prussia (which formed the nucleus of the modern German Empire) and other smaller but eager nations. Then it was that English manufacturers became more and more anxious to get into Parliament, which then consisted almost entirely of landed gentry who rather objected to the new class of rich manufacturers. The latter however were very determined, and in 1832 the Reform Act gave them political power and their leaders had a majority in Parliament. Almost immediately they began to put into practice some of their *laissez-faire* theories. "Every vestige of State regulation of trade must be swept away," they

said. "We must have Free Trade. Competition will regulate everything for us, trade must be given a chance to flow into its natural channels, unhampered by taxes, tariffs or bounties." The great leaders of this party were Richard Cobden and John Bright, and in 1846 the last traces of the Mercantile System were swept away and England became the land of Free Trade.

English statesmen expected other countries to follow our example, but so far none of the great nations has done so permanently. All of them have been trying hard to foster their own industries, to utilise the wonderful inventions of Englishmen, to invent remarkable machines and processes for themselves. In other words, the great nations have been trying to make up the ground they lost during the Napoleonic wars. They are anxious to develop their own resources, to make themselves rich, to own colonies, to have access to foreign markets.

But the enormous start that England gained in the early years of the nineteenth century has not yet been wholly lost. Throughout the whole period the growth of English industries has always been to a very large extent dependent on the growth of our colonies. They have supplied us with vast quantities of food-stuffs—wheat, meat, tea, coffee, cocoa and sugar, and raw materials; we have sent to them textile goods, hardware, machinery, bridges, ships, railways and engines. About one-quarter of our imports are from our colonies, to which nearly one-third of our exports go in return.

It is clear therefore that had it not been for our

acquisition of colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries we should not so soon have heeded to increase the rate and the amount of production of commodities ; inventors would probably not have been so anxious to make machines produce so rapidly. In other words, if there had been no war for colonies and if there had been no colonies urgently desiring our manufactured goods, the Industrial Revolution, with all its good and bad effects, would not have taken place when it did, or as rapidly as it did. Moreover, if we had not been successful in these wars, we should have been far less able to meet the demands of foreign rivalry and of the Industrial Revolution. For our colonies not only increased the demand for our manufactures, but also supplied the raw materials to employ our people. That is the real historical importance to British workpeople of the growth of our empire.

How far the colonies will help us to develop our industries in the future one cannot say. Almost all of them are now trying to produce their own manufactured goods instead of buying them all from us. But the wealth of our colonies is as yet very imperfectly known. Not one of them is more than half developed, and though there is a steady stream of emigrants leaving England yearly to go to work in our lands across the seas there is still ample room for more.

But we are rapidly approaching the time when the other nations will have made up so much of their lost ground that we shall have to consider how we can maintain our commercial and industrial



prosperity; in any such consideration our colonies will necessarily play a very large part; and it is perhaps not exaggerating to say that their future importance to England will be even greater than their past.

## CHAPTER V

### LOOKING BACKWARD

IN an earlier chapter we have imagined Queen Elizabeth and Queen Anne comparing notes and finding that England had altered very little in a hundred years. But if Queen Anne could have come back and compared notes with Queen Victoria in 1837 she would have been bewildered by the enormous differences. She would have seen that England was no longer an agricultural country; no longer was the south of England the home of the national wealth and enterprise. She would have seen that the population had more than trebled in little more than a hundred years; that from  $5\frac{1}{2}$  millions it had grown to nearer 20 millions, and that the great majority of these lived north of a line drawn from the Humber to the Bristol Channel, and dwelt not in quiet villages but in crowded towns, passing their lives in ways utterly different from those of their grandparents. Most of the forests of the North had been felled and the wild wooded glens of the Pennines were now dotted with towns and villages full of great factories. She would probably have been horrified to find South Staffordshire, the Potteries, the Evewash Valley, South Yorks, South-West

Lancashire and Northumberland and Durham dark and unlovely with scores of collieries, refuse-heaps, factories and foundries. She would have seen the old roads replaced by fine turnpikes and supplemented not only by canals but by the wonderful new railways which were so soon to cover the country. England had in fact become the workshop of the world, and before the death of Queen Victoria had a population of over 40,000,000 and had become also the market of the world.

It is the process by which England has become so vast, so wealthy and so powerful which we have been tracing in this book. We have followed the growth and decay of the manorial system with the parallel growth and decay of the gilds. We have seen how the succeeding domestic system also grew and decayed, accompanied by the great trading companies. Then came the age in which factories and large-scale production prevailed; agriculture became of only secondary importance; we reached the age of wages, of rent, of profit, of interest.

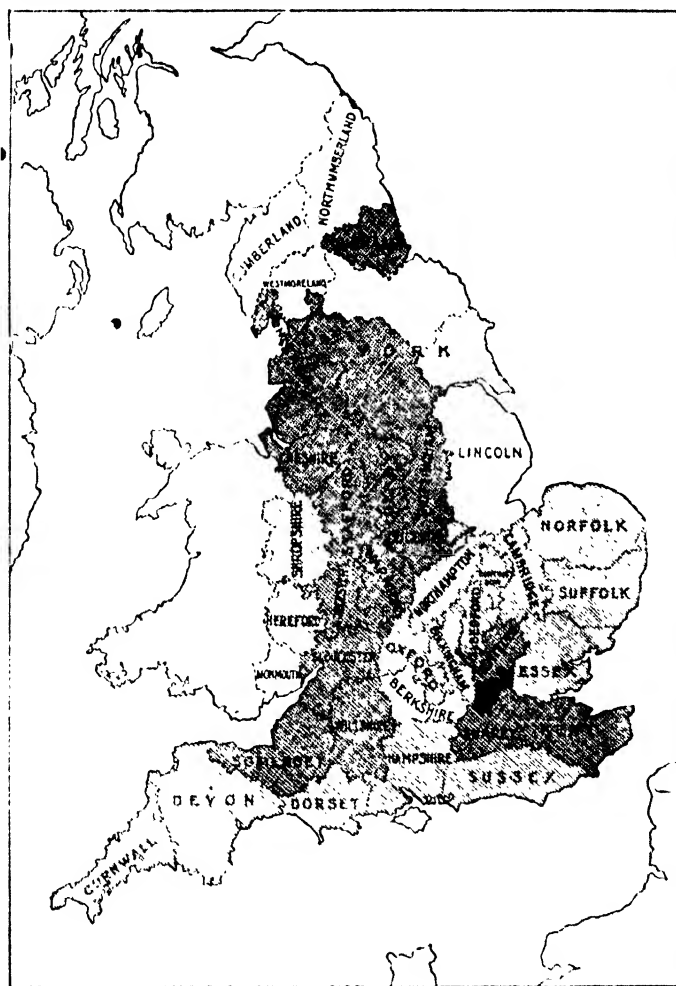
To look at our history another way—we have studied the age when the lives of the people were regulated by local organisations like the manor and the gild. This was followed by an age in which the State regulated trade and industry by means of what was called the Mercantile System, which was superseded by the period when it was held wrong for the State to interfere, when individual liberty and free competition were glorified. We have now once more reached an age that believes in State Regulation; but whereas the former age believed in regulation in order to make the nation powerful and wealthy,

this modern age thinks less of the nation as a whole than of the well-being of each of the individuals composing the nation. The Mercantilists believed that if England was wealthy, had many ships and prosperous industries and was very powerful, then all would be well with all Englishmen. We on the contrary believe that if all Englishmen are healthy, well fed, well clothed and decently housed, if all Englishmen have leisure for education and recreation, then England will be wealthy, have many ships and prosperous industries and be very powerful.

Perhaps our policy will some day also be superseded ; perhaps we shall think of ourselves in the future not merely as a nation but as an empire which rules itself for the good of every human being who composes it. But of one thing we may be quite sure. It is that, just as in the past, no system or policy will develop and continue to exist unless there is a need for it, and it will decay as the need for it passes away.



# DENSITY OF POPULATION IN ENGLAND ABOUT 1800.A.D.



UNDER 40 PEOPLE TO THE SQUARE MILE					
BETWEEN 40 & 60	"	"	"	"	"
" 60 & 150	"	"	"	"	"
OVER 150	"	"	"	"	"





## INTERESTING BOOKS FOR FURTHER READING

1. Stenton's *William the Conqueror*. Gives a very good and full account of *Domesday Book*, of England, and of the Conqueror.
2. Oman's *The Great Revolt*, 1381. An excellent account, very vivid and complete.
3. Miss Bateson's *Mediæval England*
4. Miss Dormer Harris' *Life in an Old English Town*. A very interesting study of the history of Coventry.
5. Mrs. Green's *Town Life in the Fifteenth Century*. Is full of interesting stories.
6. Jusserand's *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages*. A very chatty and picturesque book.
7. Miss Leonard's *Early History of English Poor Relief*. A rather harder book but full of interesting things.
8. Hobson's *Evolution of Modern Capitalism*. The best book on the rise of large-scale production.
9. Misses Hutchins' and Harrison's *History of Factory Legislation*. Clear, easy to read and very necessary.
10. Hammond's *The Village Labourer*. A brilliant and vivid account of the enclosures, 1760-1832.
11. Hasbach's *English Agricultural Labourer*.
12. Toynbee's *Industrial Revolution*. The standard work on the subject.
13. Webb's *History of Trade Unionism*. A very full and clear history.
14. Smart's *Economic Annals of the Nineteenth Century*. A work of vast learning and packed with minute information.
15. Slater's *The English Peasantry*.
16. Wallas' *Life of Francis Place*.

## FOR GENERAL INDUSTRIAL HISTORY

1. Cunningham's *Growth of English Industry and Commerce*. A difficult but very full and remarkable work—contains a vast amount of material.



## 156 THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

2. Townsend Warner's *Landmarks of English Industrial History*. A useful text-book.
3. Meredith's *Economic History*. A more advanced text-book.
4. Ashley's *Economic History* (2 vols.).
5. Price's *English Industry and Commerce*.
6. De Gibbins' *Industrial History*. Still useful and interesting, though written before researches into the subject had gone very far; it therefore requires modification in many places.
7. Thorold Rogers' books on the subject contain much good material, but, as pioneer studies, require to be used with care in the light of recent research.

### FOR REALLY ADVANCED STUDY

#### A. ON THE MANOR AND "DOMESDAY BOOK"

1. Maitland's *Domesday Book and Beyond*.
2. Maitland's *Township and Borough*.
3. Vinogradoff's *Villeinage in England*.
4. Vinogradoff's *Growth of the Manor*.
5. Vinogradoff's *English Society in the Eleventh Century*.
6. Hone's *The Manor and Manorial Records*.
7. Gross' *Gild Merchant*.

#### B. ON OTHER SPECIAL SUBJECTS

1. Andreades' *The History of the Bank of England*.
2. Nicholls' *History of English Poor Law*.
3. Macrosty's *The Trust Movement in British Industry*.
4. Unwin's *Industrial Organisation in the Sixteenth Century*.
5. Chapman's *Lancashire Cotton Industry*.
6. Schmoller's *The Mercantile System*.
7. Bagehot's *Lombard Street*.
8. Withers' *The Meaning of Money*.
9. Holyoake's *History of Co-operation*.
10. Hewins' *English Trade and Finance*.

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